

The World's Longest Running Magazine Of Sci-Fi • Horror • Fantasy

STARBURST



ISSUE
399

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to **Starburst** Issue 399.

It seems like only yesterday that I took over as editor of Starburst. I will let you in on a little secret it was only supposed to be for a year, yet here I am 3 years later. No one ever leaves the KGB or Starburst! When I started, issue 400 seemed a very long way away, but here we are. You have in your hands the last ever issue of Starburst in this format. Issue 400 means a new Starburst. It's been a fantastic 3 years, and on behalf of the editorial team I want to thank you for getting behind the flag, and helping us get back where we belong.

With this issue we go out with a bang. It's Spidey all the way. We even bring you the thoughts of the cast and crew of **The Amazing Spider-Man 2**. We also chat to the Russo Brothers over **Captain America: The Winter Soldier**. You heard right, it doesn't matter which one is your favourite - we spoke to both of them!

All this, tons of other goodness, and your regular favourites. So give the mag a big hug, as it embarks on the next phase of its journey...

...and keep watching the weird and wonderful.


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STARBURST

THINGS TO COME

a round-up of the best (and worst) of this month's genre news

For all the latest news updates go to www.starburstmagazine.com



THE LAST OF US

Screen Gems and Sam Raimi's Ghost House Pictures are pairing up to bring the wildly popular post-apocalyptic videogame **The Last of Us** to the big screen. Ordinarily with announcements like this there's an outpouring of concern from fans of the property, and with decades worth of woeful adaptations under Hollywood's belt it's quite understandable; but increasingly it appears that the bigger games developers get, the more control they're managing to retain in the movie's production. (Ubisoft actually took it a stage further when they decided to think about making an **Assassin's Creed** movie – they simply opened their own film studio and cut out the middleman.) In this particular instance, makers Naughty Dog will work closely alongside Ghost House, with the game's creative director Neil Druckmann providing the screenplay for this incarnation as well.

For the non-gamers amongst you, **The Last of Us** is set twenty years after the US was exposed to a lethal fungus which turned those infected into violent drones hell-bent on spreading the disease. With much of civilization laid waste by the pandemic, the story's principal characters are survivors Joel, a hardened black market smuggler in his late 40s, and Ellen-Page Ellie, a teenage orphan who may just hold the key to ending the virus and restoring order to the world...

In other game related news this month, it was also revealed that Warner Bros were in the early stages of developing a movie based on the hit building game **Minecraft**. While this coaxed significantly less interest from us than **The Last of Us** announcement, in a post-**LEGO Movie** world we've since learnt our lesson when it comes to calling out projects that look like shameless cash-ins! | KH

CONSTANTINE

Casting is in full swing on NBC's upcoming pilot, **Constantine**, an adaptation of the popular DC/Venture comic book **Hellblazer**, with the titular role of the chain-smoking blue-collar warlock going to Matt Ryan, a 32-year old Welsh actor best known for his work on **Criminal Minds**: **Suspect Behaviour**. Joining Ryan are Charles Halford (**True Detective**), Harold Perrineau (**LOST**) and Lucy Griffiths (**True Blood**). Halford has landed the role of Chas Chandler, John's oldest friend and one of his only associates who didn't end up dead. Be aware that although they share a first name, he will be nothing like the annoying character played by The Beef in the 2005 film, who bore no resemblance to his comic book counterpart. Like pretty much everything else, Perrineau will play Manny, an authoritative figure assigned to watch over Constantine. It's unclear if this is in a mortal, possibly law enforcement capacity or something more supernatural such as a mid-ranking angel keeping tabs on those who travel the synchronicity highway. Griffiths, who was last seen in the BBC's mediocre reworking of **Robin Hood** as [Maid] Marian, has been cast as Liv, a partner of Constantine in apparent possession of unspecified supernatural abilities (TTC's money is on some kind of psychic/precognitive/telekinetic powers). Few official details are known about the plot, but a brief, leaked synopsis suggests John will come to the aid of a deceased friend whose daughter is having demon trouble. One thing that has been a constant since news of the show broke is that this series will pull its inspiration from the 'New 52' version of the character, meaning a younger take on the antihero. This also suggests there will probably be no appearance by Gemma, Constantine's niece and sort-of apprentice, who grew from precocious kid to fledgling mage as the series progressed. Shame. The script for the pilot has been written by David Goyer (**Man of Steel**) and Daniel Cerone (**Dexter**), and will see Neil Marshall take directing duties. It's expected to hit screens towards the middle of this year. | AM+AP

AIR

Robert Kirkman has enjoyed a fair amount of success over the years. Comic book superstar? Check. Smash hit TV show? Been there, done that. It comes as no surprise then that **The Walking Dead** creator would eventually set his sights on the silver screen. (Okay, so he's only on producing duties here, but still. Impressive.) First on his slate will be **Air**, a sci-fi picture that takes place in an underground cryogenic facility housing people chosen to one day repopulate the Earth after nuclear fallout effed up the surface good and proper. Signing on to play the low-level workers tasked with looking after the icy inhabitants are **TWD**'s Norman Reedus, who plays furry fan favourite Daryl Dixon, and Djimon Hounsou, who can soon be seen making his Marvel Cinematic Universe debut as Korath the Pursuer in August's **Guardians of the Galaxy**. Expect the pressures of the duo's isolated surroundings to start testing one or both of their sanities before Act II rolls around. The claustrophobic thriller, formerly known as **Wake Cycle**, comes from the mind of Christian Cantamessa, who cut his teeth writing videogames such as **Red Dead Redemption**, and directing several self-penned shorts. Expect more on **Air** over the coming months... | KH

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

Now that **G.I. Joe: Retaliation** director Jon M Chu has left **Masters of the Universe** to direct **G.I. Joe 3** (seriously, wasn't two of them enough?) a number of prospective replacements have been put forward. According to reports, the current favourites appear to be Jeff Wadlow (**Kick-Ass 2**), Mike Cahill (**Another Earth**), Harald Zwart (**The Mortal Instruments**) and Chris McKay (**Robot Chicken**). Other rumoured directors include Joe Cornish (**Attack the Block**), Rian Johnson (**Looper**), Andy Muschietti (**Mama**), Kirk DeMico & Chris Sanders (**The Croods**), and Phil Lord & Chris Miller (**The LEGO Movie**). That the scope of the candidates' various film styles includes animation, action, drama, sci-fi and horror probably indicates that the film's direction is being looked at from all angles before any decisions are made and production begins. Although we can only hope that whatever comes out is an improvement on the 1987 homoerotic Aryan wet dream starring Dolph Landgren. | AM

SHARKNADO 2

With the sequel currently shooting in New York City, details have emerged on a few formerly secret celebrity cameos that we can expect. Joining a cast that includes Ian Ziering, Tara Reid, Vivica A. Fox, Mark McGrath, Kelly Osbourne, Judd Hirsch, Andy Dick and Judah Friedlander, **Sharknado 2: The Second One** will feature appearances from Perez Hilton, Biz Markie, Sandra Denton (Pepa from Salt-N-Pepa), Robert Klein and professional wrestling machine Kurt Angle. They're certainly pushing the boat out to bring in the big names on this one! In terms of a release, we also now know the film will premiere July 31st on the Syfy channel in the US, with a UK airing and DVD/Blu-ray release expected to follow shortly after. | AP

TERMINATOR

After starring in back-to-back duds, Australian actor Jai Courtney has landed the coveted role of Kyle Reese in 2015's highly anticipated **Terminator** relaunch. We can only presume that the film's producers skipped **A Good Day to Die Hard** and **I, Frankenstein** like other sane folk did. As previously reported, Courtney will star opposite Emilia Clarke as Sarah Connor, Jason Clarke as John Connor, and Arnold Schwarzenegger as Sergeant William Candy (we hope). The movie begins filming this month and will shoot in New Orleans, San Francisco and LA under the direction of **Thor: The Dark World**'s Alan Taylor. | KH

UTOPIA

Attitudes towards television have always differed across the pond. Britain has a history of nursing series, not all of them easy on the eyes, and contributing to the idea of cult TV shows such as **The Prisoner**. Today, however, there's a sense of each nation trying to outdo one another in terms of production, acting and audience. Combining forces, as in the case of the hugely successful **Game of Thrones**, seems only logical, but that's an argument for another time. Channel 4's **Utopia**, for all intents and purposes, was a successful, interesting and quite barmy show. It was inevitable that the US would want a crack at it themselves, following in a trend of UK shows remade for an American audience. HBO has really been a high benchmark of TV and, perhaps unsurprisingly, is bridging the gap between film and TV. Acclaimed filmmaker David Fincher and **Gone Girl** writer Gillian Flynn will be the driving creative force behind the show. Fincher was also recently involved with Netflix drama **House of Cards**, and it clearly left an impression. HBO has granted him flexibility to take the show as far as the UK equivalent explored. It will be interesting to see how the show translates, culturally speaking, and whether it'll get the same reception. Hopefully some of the kinks will be ironed out there'll be an altogether more well-rounded series. | DC

THE LIBRARIAN

Six years after the airing of the third and final movie in **The Librarian** franchise, **The Curse of The Judas Chalice**, TNT are said to be developing the project as a ten episode series. Original producer Dean Devlin will return along with the movies' star Noah Wyle, who is in early talks to serve as an executive producer. Although Wyle played the lead role of Flynn Carsen, his starring role in TNT's hit **Falling Skies** prohibits his return to world of **The Librarian**. However, it's hoped that Wyle's schedule would allow him to appear in the feature length premiere as well as the season's final two episodes. So with the original star potentially taking on an executive producer role and hopefully appearing in a couple of episodes, the proposed series' dynamic will be slightly different from the original TV movie trilogy. Instead the show is tentatively called **The Librarians**, and will feature a group of younger men and women hoping to become Flynn's successor as the protector of secret artifacts. It's also rumoured that movie regulars Bob Newhart and Jane Curtin will reprise their roles. If all goes to plan then filming in Oregon could begin in April with the series premiering later this year. They better not leave it too long as there's a fine for late returns! (Librarian humour.) | CJ

SNEAK PEEK...



This newly released still of Marv's ugly mug can mean only one thing... our 9 year wait to see Frank Miller's world back on screen is almost over! **Sin City: A Dame to Kill For** opens in UK cinemas August 29th.

GOTHAM

Following on from last issue's news that upcoming series **Gotham** had found its Jim Gordon in the form of Ben McKenzie, Fox has now announced the rest of the cast. As Oswald Cobblepot, aka The Penguin, is Robin Taylor, a rising twenty something recently seen in small roles in the likes of **The Walking Dead**, **Another Earth** and **Person of Interest**, but still probably best known for 2006 Jonah Hill comedy **Accepted**. This being a prequel, Cobblepot, like lead character Gordon himself, is still very much at the beginning of his career, and thus has to answer to crime boss Fish Mooney, who will be played by **The Matrix Reloaded/Revolutions'** Jada Pinkett Smith. Joining the show as Alfred Pennyworth, the Wayne family's faithful butler, is the ever-grizzled Sean Pertwee. As for the approach to **Gotham's** Alfred, it appears that he will be based on Geoff John's **Batman: Earth One** version. For those not familiar with the character of Sarah Essen, in the comic book continuity she's a colleague of Gordon's, his boss even at times, who he has an affair with; **Burn Notice's** Zabryna Guevara will portray her here. Another fellow police officer will be DC regular Harvey Bullock, the part of which has gone to Donal Logue (**Vikings**). **Being Human's** Erin Richards takes Barbara Kean, the fiancée of Jim Gordon and the future mother of Barbara Gordon (aka Batgirl). Amongst the cops, criminals and proto-supervillains, the show also has a representation in the younger demographic now that the teenagers Bruce Wayne and Selina Kyle have been cast. 13-year old David Mazouz, best known as Kiefer Sutherland's autistic son in holistic existential mystery series **Touch**, will play the boy who will go on to become the Bat. As was already known, the murder of Bruce's parents will be investigated by Detective James Gordon, forming the basis of the series' initial plot. Former **America's Best Dance Crew** contestant and acting newcomer Camren Bicondova has been cast as fellow orphan and future Catwoman, who is already dabbling in a life of crime as a shifty pickpocket. It's not too much of a leap to assume she and Bruce will meet early on, and that despite the contrast of their polar opposite social circumstances they will nevertheless be drawn to each other by isolation and loneliness.

Fox have emphatically stated that this is not a Batman TV show, but that's less a dismissal of possible plotlines that wouldn't come to fruition for at least five years anyway and more likely a pre-emptive defence against backlash similar to that received by

Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. from everyone who thought it was going to be a weekly 40-minute version of **The Avengers**. There's no real reason not to assume that should the series last as the two actors grow up, we could well see them don the costumes of their famous alter egos. | AM+AP

WIZARDS VS ALIENS

The BBC have confirmed that the popular children's science-fiction adventure **Wizards vs Aliens** has been renewed for a third series. The show was created by Russell T Davies and Phil Ford and replaced **The Sarah Jane Adventures** in the CBBC schedules following the death of star Elisabeth Sladen in 2011. The series tells of the exploits of young wizard Tom Clarke and his best friend Benny as they battle to thwart the schemes of the magic-devouring aliens the Nekross. The new series, set to film from next month as usual at the BBC's Roath Lock studios in Cardiff and on location around South Wales, sees the show's scale widen as Tom and Benny encounter new aliens and "a whole variety of magical creatures." Controller of CBBC, Cheryl Taylor, said: "CBBC is the home of thrilling and inspiring drama for children and **Wizards vs Aliens** is a perfect example of that. The series is vivid and brave and our audience loves the portrayal of loyal friendship alongside exciting alien battles and stunning wizardry. Children want to talk about Tom, Benny and the Nekross and we know they'll be delighted to hear a third series is being conjured up by the talented team in Wales." **Wizards vs Aliens** will return to CBBC in the UK towards the end of the year. | PM

HEROES

The landmark NBC series is set for a 2015 return with a 13-part miniseries subtitled **Heroes Reborn**. The new show will focus on a self-contained story arc, which interestingly was the original intention for the property. No story or cast details have been released as yet, but creator Tim Kring will also return to take up executive producer duties. In addition, there'll be a digital series to introduce the characters prior to its airing. Let's hope Kring and company learn from past mistakes and avoid the poor narrative choices that saw the once acclaimed show cancelled by its fourth season. | DC

POSTER MORTEM



Wonder if the Paramount marketing guys have considered doing a **Transformers: Age of Extinction** poster that promotes the fact Shia LaBeouf ISN'T in this one? Forget Marky Mark, lady from **Bates Motel**, guy rumoured for **Star Wars** every five minutes and depressed Optimus, that right there is surely the studio's biggest sell!

SUNDOWNING

Hard as it is to remember now, there was a time when M. Night Shyamalan was being heralded as the next Spielberg. Fast-forward to modern day and the poor fella is considered one of the worst big budget directors around. Shyamalan raised a profile with **The Sixth Sense**, **Unbreakable** and (to a much lesser extent) the underrated **Signs**, but after numerous misfires like **Lady in the Water**, the unintentionally hilarious **The Happening** and the awkward **The Last Airbender**, the filmmaker has been in search of rejuvenation. Well here's hoping he finds it with the interesting news of his next project...

Entitled **Sundowning**, the director's next film is a complete departure from the studio system and reportedly only has a cast and crew of 10 people! The news broke over at Shyamalan's own Twitter page, when he revealed a production image, as well as posting a series of tweets/pics about the horror film, at one point stating, "The cast is sensational. The performances were so captivating. I was walking on air as I went home. I hope I don't screw this up." Us too.

That's all the detail we have at the time of going to print, but colour us encouraged by this switch from bloated budgets to off-the-radar indie filmmaking. | JB

THE CONJURING 2

After its steamrolling (or should that be *scream* rolling?) [*No... Ed*] box office performance last year, a sequel to **The Conjuring** was undoubtedly a must. As were numerous spin-offs so it seems. However fans can now stop wondering when the Warrens will be back, as New Line and Warner Brothers have announced the release date for **The Conjuring 2**. And wouldn't you know it's around the Halloween season! The film is now set to haunt cinema screens on October 23rd 2015, which as of yet has not been snapped up by any other releases (though it surely can't be long until a **Paranormal Activity** film makes its presence felt).

As previously reported, the currently untitled sequel will not be directed by James Wan, but it's now official that we will see Vera Farmiga & Patrick Wilson reprise their lead roles as paranormal investigators Lorraine and Ed Warren respectively. Based, like the first, on a real Warren case, **The Conjuring**'s writers Carey & Chad Hayes have already interviewed the real Lorraine Warren to aid their scripting. There are numerous amounts of source material to fuel a sequel, so let's hope the writers can conjure up some of the same old-school frights the first did so successfully. However, before we see the Warrens return, we've got the first of three planned spin-offs to look forward to, with **Annabelle** (the origin story of **The Conjuring**'s creepy-ass doll) currently shooting in LA for a proposed October debut. | JB

THE RAID

The director of the Hollywood remake of **The Raid** has been announced, thereby reminding us that a Hollywood remake of **The Raid** was even being discussed. Australian filmmaker Patrick Hughes, who previously gave us neo-western **Red Hill** and is currently helming **The Expendables 3**, has been tasked with transposing **The Raid**'s story into English, thus granting audiences freedom from subtitles during the film's approximately two dozen lines of dialogue. Snarking aside, part of **The Raid**'s appeal was its unfamiliarity. The Indonesian country and language are unknown to most audiences, while the number of westerners who had even heard of *penak silat* before the film's release was unlikely to have reached treble figures. All we'll probably get with the remake is a generic action film whose plot will once again be constantly compared to that of **Dredd**, along with IMDb boards awash with tedious repetitions of "Rip-off!!!" | AM

AND FINALLY...

Nike promise **Back to the Future Part II**-style Power Laces by 2015. Steven and Max Spielberg continue to stay schtum on the progress of **Jaws 5** through 19. Slackers.

+++

Though he's officially out of the running for **Independence Day 2**, Will Smith hasn't turned his back on sci-fi completely (and following the disaster that was **After Earth** we wouldn't actually blame him if he did). Instead, he's eyeing the lead in an adaptation of Marcus Sakey's 2013 novel **Brilliance**, about a super human FBI agent whose abilities are used to track down terrorists.

+++

Platinum Dunes are pressing ahead with a remake of Alfred Hitchcock's **The Birds**, with Dutch director Diederik Van Rooijen signing on to helm. So ludicrous is the decision to remake this 1963 tale of terror, TTC can only presume Michael Bay mistook the world's continued fascination with **Angry Birds** to mean something *entirely* different. It's a very popular smart phone game, Michael! Nobody wants to see this crap!

+++

To some readers, the threat of a fifth big-screen adventure for aging action hero **Indiana Jones** is too much to bear, so we won't ruin their day by mentioning Disney are reportedly in discussions with Ford to fast track a sixth also.

+++

Ignoring the fact we already had a **Knight Rider** relaunch 5 minutes ago, The Weinstein Company are keen to test-drive the franchise's bankability anew with a complete overhaul. And given that the two names mentioned for starring roles thus far are Chris Pratt and Danny McBride, it appears they'll be aiming for a more comedic approach. As for which of the two funnymen will be providing K.I.T.T.'s vocals and who'll be in the driver's seat, that information is currently unknown. But if we had to guess, McBride's certainly got a head start in the Michael Knight perm stakes. Just sayin'.

+++

Knock Knock. Who's there? *Eli Roth*. Eli Roth who? *You cheeky son of a... What do you mean, "Eli Roth who?" Look, I know I haven't released a movie in years but there's no need for that when to get of sass! Besides, I've just signed on to direct a twisted new picture about two mysterious women who seduce and destroy a married bloke. It's called Knock Knock. Who's there? Forget it.*

+++

It was the moment die-hard **Fantastic Four** fans had dreaded. Yup, the rumours were true – the characters and origin story of the comic books were all getting a radical overhaul at the hands of Fox and director Josh Trank. Miles Teller, Kate Mara, Michael B. Jordan and Jamie Bell officially signed on this month to play Mr. Fantastic, The Invisible Woman, The Human Torch and The Thing respectively (although whether they get to actually keep those flashy monikers in this new "grounded" version remains to be seen). FF? FFS more like.

+++

Wrong Turn 6 is officially a thing. What do you mean you didn't even know there was a **Wrong Turn 5**?! Sheesh. Keep up, guys!

+++

Though March marked the sad passing of **Ghostbusters** co-creator and star Harold Ramis, it seems the long mooted third movie may actually still go ahead with script rewrites reportedly already taking place. If fans were skeptical of **Ghostbusters III** in the past, to get an idea how big the pressure Sony must now be under to not screw this up, you must first imagine a Twinkie. Now imagine a Twinkie thirty-five feet long and weighing approximately six hundred pounds...

TTC 399 written by Kris Heys, Andrew Marshall, Andrew Pollard, Jack Bottomley, Dominic Cuthbert, Christian Jones and Paul Mount



LIEV SCHREIBER

THE LAST DAYS ON MARS

BY ASSOCIATION WITH BONO SCANNÁN NA hÉIREANN / THE IRISH FILM BOARD PRESENTS A QUENTY FILM IN ASSOCIATION WITH FANTASTIC FILMS "THE LAST DAYS ON MARS"
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BASED ON THE STORY FROM "THE ANIMATORS" BY SYDNEY J. BORDUS WRITTEN BY CLIVE DAWSON DIRECTED BY MICHAEL KUHN AND ANDREA CORNELL EDITED BY DIARD ROBINSON



IN CINEMAS APRIL 11



LOOK OUT!
HERE COMES THE
SPIDER-MAN...



BY
ANDREW
FOLLARD



**JOIN STARBURST. ANDREW GARFIELD.
JAMIE FOXX AND MORE AS WE TAKE
AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT ONE OF THE
YEAR'S MOST EAGERLY AWAITED MOVIE
RELEASES. SONY PICTURES'
THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2...**

With superheroes now firmly embedded in the conscious of the average cineaste, it seems impossible for a year to go by without three or four comic book movies hitting the big screen. In a world of national icons, Gods and billionaires, it's hard to stand out. That is, unless you happen to be one of the most beloved and famous comic book characters of all time: Spider-Man. After Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* series was shelved and rebooted as Marc Webb's *The Amazing Spider-Man* in 2012, Sony Pictures are looking to move forward with a whole host of Spider-centric movies.

When *The Amazing Spider-Man* came to a close, Dr. Curt Connors (Rhys Ifans), aka the Lizard, was incarcerated, Captain Stacy (Denis Leary) was dead, Peter Parker (Andrew Garfield) had promised the dying Stacy that he would stay away from daughter Gwen (Emma Stone), and there was a darker side of Oscorp lurking in the shadows. Now we have a sequel that is set to reveal more about Spider-Man, more about Peter Parker, more about his parents, more about Oscorp and introduce us to a potential plethora of villains.

Where *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* picks up is with Peter Parker now graduating and still deeply in love with Gwen Stacy. For a character that has had so many dark moments in the comic book, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* sees Peter Parker having a blast being Spider-Man. As that great power and great responsibility yarn rings true, Peter is there whenever New York needs him. But when a new foe, Electro (Jamie Foxx), arises, Spider-Man faces a threat that has him questioning his own abilities. Not content with just Electro, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* introduces us to Aleksei Sytsevich (Paul Giamatti), who will go on to become the monstrous, thick-skinned Rhino, and to an old friend of Peter's, Harry Osborn (*Chronicle*'s Dane DeHaan), with Harry overseeing the running of Oscorp due to his father Norman (Chris Cooper) being incapacitated, it becomes evident that the shady company has a vested interest in Peter Parker.

Yes, Electro is the main threat to Spider-Man in his sequel, but it's clear that Oscorp will be playing a vital role in the future of the Spider-Man movies going forward. And as such, with a Sinister Six and a Venom movie both confirmed (see box outs), not to mention *The Amazing Spider-Man 3* and *The Amazing Spider-Man 4* (2016 and 2018 respectively), audiences will see quite a few seeds planted in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. Just from early preview footage alone, there's sightings of Doctor Octopus' tentacles and the Vulture's harness, not to mention a nod to Michael Morbius, aka Morbius the Living Vampire.

Recent reports have also confirmed that B.J. Novak's previously unconfirmed role, which many believed to be that of Doc Ock, is actually Alistair Smythe, son of Spencer Smythe and scientific genius partly responsible for the various Spider-Slayers that have hunted the





VENOM

Last seen on the big screen played by Topher Grace in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man 3*, Eddie Brock is set to be brought into Sony's Spider-verse at some point in the near future. As Brock will turn into the beastly Venom, it's logical to presume that Spider-Man will also have a run-in with the strange black symbiote himself, before the substance attaches it to Eddie. Depending on what version of Eddie Brock this cinematic universe decides to go with, we could get the jacked-up, disgruntled news reporter that was embarrassed by Spider-Man or we could even get the college-kid Brock that is just a few younger than his good bro, Peter Parker. No release date has been announced for *Venom* just yet, although Alex Kurtzman & Roberto Orci (*Star Trek Into Darkness*) and Ed Solomon (*Men in Black*) are currently developing the script, with Kurtzman also on directing duties.



Wallcrawler over the decades. Viral footage, most notably on the Daily Bugle's faux Tumblr page, has also referenced the likes of J. Jonah Jameson, Ned Leeds (who becomes the Hobgoblin at one point), the Enforcers and Eddie Brock (who becomes Venom). Previously released images of animal-based architects have also had fans suggesting that the 'Spider-verse' Sony is creating is alluding to Kraven the Hunter. Given that the Lizard is still alive and well, albeit locked up, Sony are certainly giving themselves plenty of options for when they finally do pull the trigger on the Sinister Six team. Added to this, Giamatti, Foxx and Cooper have all revealed that they should be returning for *The Amazing Spider-Man 3*, meaning that Rhino, Electro and likely the Green Goblin are accounted for.

Before we get carried away with ourselves about films further down the line, Marc Webb's *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* will see Harry Osborn become the Green Goblin. Whilst the comic books have generally always had Norman as the first Gobby, Harry has taken on the moniker at several points. With Harry curious as to why Oscorp has been monitoring Peter Parker for so long, and with his alter-ego as the Green Goblin, it will be interesting to see how the Harry Osborn arc plays out in the movie. Electro is supposedly the main villain of the film and Norman Osborn is rumoured to be overseeing all of the villains alluded to earlier in this piece, leading to his reveal as the Green Goblin down the line... so where could that leave Harry's Goblin? Things could definitely get interesting on that front.

One thing that long-time comic book fans have been speculating about since Gwen Stacy was first announced as appearing in *The Amazing Spider-Man* is the death of Gwen. A momentous moment in Spider-Man comic book lore, could we really get to see Gwen bite the bullet on the big screen? Make no mistake about it, we take Gwen's death as a given, believing it to happen a little further down the line in *The Amazing Spider-Man 3*. With how recent interviews with various crew and cast have gone lately, including Emma Stone herself, it doesn't seem like such a ridiculous idea for Gwen Stacy to die in this upcoming sequel. One thing that does stand out on that front, though, is that Gwen's comic book death – which is iconic in the life of Peter Parker and Spider-Man – happens at the hands of the Norman Osborn Green Goblin. With this movie featuring a highly-ill Norman, is killing Parker's girlfriend a bit too much to ask of him at this point?

The Amazing Spider-Man 2 will feature a whole heap of action, but there's also set to be revelations on many fronts. Away from Oscorp stalking Peter, one main aspect of the story seems to be the unravelling of the mystery of Richard and Mary Parker, Peter's parents. Initially the story of Richard and Mary was supposed to play a much larger role in *The Amazing Spider-Man* but ended up cut. With preview footage promising some big reveals on this front, here's hoping that this part of the Spider-Man story gets to remain in the film this time out.

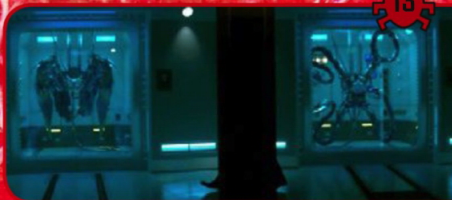
If Peter Parker is graduating, will he need to find himself a job of sorts? You know what we're

getting at here: will we see the Daily Bugle? It appears that the initial answer to that question is a firm yes, with early leaked images from the set of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* showing Daily Bugle news vans. And if you're talking the Bugle then you have to talk J. Jonah Jameson. There's been no news on Jameson appearing in the film or of any actors being cast in the role, but surely it's only a matter of time before J.J. debuts in this rebooted Spider-Man cinematic world! Then if you have Jonah, you have to look at bringing in the likes of Betty Brant and Joe "Robbie" Robertson. The fact that so much of the viral promotional work for the sequel has gone through a Daily Bugle-based website suggest that it won't be long before we get a look at the paper and those involved with it. Personally, we think *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* may be just a tad too soon to expect to see a raspy, exasperated Jonah spewing vitriol at the young Peter Parker. Still, we'd sell our grandparents to see J.K. Simmons reprise the Jameson role that he played in all three of Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* movies.

So *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* will definitely give audiences Electro, Rhino and the Harry Osborn Green Goblin, with teasers towards Morbius, Spider-Slayers, the Vulture and Doctor Octopus. We wouldn't be totally shocked to see other members of Spider-Man's rogues' gallery alluded to at points, too. The original Sinister Six was made up of Doctor Octopus, Electro, Mysterio, Kraven the Hunter, Sandman and the Vulture. Electro, Doc Ock and the Vulture will all be referenced in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* in some way, so it remains interesting to see which other villains will get roped into the Sinister Six at a later date and just how they may be referred to here. The supervillain team-up has included various members of the decades, so all bets are off on that front.

The prospect of a Spider-Man who is now fully comfortable in his own skin going up against some of his more prominent rogues, at least in comic book terms, is a wonderful prospect. Yes, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* was initially billed as Spidey vs. Electro, and so the inclusion of more villains had certain fans revisiting past memories of the terrors of *Spider-Man 3* and *X-Men: The Last Stand*; two movies that were accused of trying to shoe-horn in too many characters for one movie. We'll be honest, our initial reaction to Rhino in a small, introductory role here was no major worry to us, but the reveal that Harry Osborn would become the Green Goblin so soon, especially in a film that already had two villains, had us feeling a little trepidatious. At this point, though, as big, bug-eyed Spider-fans, we're buoyed by the recent trailers that have been released, and we're confident that *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* can learn from the errors of those aforementioned movies.

Regardless, with four further films already confirmed in Sony's Spider-Man-based world, it will be interesting to see what direction the series takes in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* when it's released in the UK this month.



THE SINISTER SIX

With an already impressive amount of Spider-Man's rogues alluded to in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, the Sinister Six seems like a logical step for Sony to take. The Sinister Six's beginnings are expected to be developed through the next few *The Amazing Spider-Man* movies, before the villainous group get their own feature. Just who they go up against – could it possibly be Venom? – is still unconfirmed. What is known is that *The Cabin in the Woods*' Drew Goddard (who is also penning the Netflix-exclusive *Daredevil* TV show) will write and direct.



ANDREW GARFIELD [PETER PARKER / SPIDER-MAN]

Spider-Man has a formidable rogues' gallery in the comic books; of them all, why do you think Electro was the right villain to go with for the sequel?

Well what I love personally about Electro is that he is human, and the journey from him going from Max into Electro is so emotionally powerful and potent. And one of my favorite aspects about what Jamie and the writers have brought to it is that you care about this bad guy. You know that he's not just a bad guy and born that way; you know that he has been created, that part of himself has been encouraged and pulled out, by evil forces in the world, by being abused, by being not seen, not recognised. Because we all need recognition and validation, but he has not received it, and so these darker impulses take over and he says, "Well, if the world doesn't care about me, I won't care about the world. I'm taking my power back. I'm going to bully those who bullied me." I mean how else is it created? It's a learned behaviour. I'm so excited about this film because that's not something that's usually dealt with in these movies, and it's really important, especially for young kids in the schoolyards, to not just go, "Oh, that guy's just a bad guy." It creates compassion, which is a beautiful gift we all have.

You said of the first *Amazing Spider-Man* how demanding it was to get in shape for the role, did you find it any easier this time around?

My trainer Armando is one of my favourite people in the world and he's a very gentle, powerful taskmaster and a passionate health and fitness person. So the regimen was pretty intense, it would have to be, because I've got to be in my suit and I've got to wear the Spandex, and I've got to be practically naked! So I'm very thankful to have Armando, because I couldn't do it with anyone else, I don't think. He's family now. He's seen me at my lowest, literally. You've got a really intimate relationship with your personal trainer. I'm glad I don't have to do it for another year, because I'm not a gym guy. I like surfing and playing basketball, but I don't like lifting weights. It puts me in an existential funk, just picking up a heavy object and putting it down over and over again. It's like the Camus book, the fable of Sisyphus where he's pushing the boulder up the mountain and it keeps on rolling back down and then he pushes it back up again.

As well as Armando, you also worked with a physical comedy consultant...

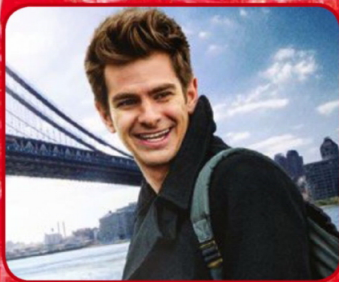
Cal McCrystal. There were certain scenes, certain ideas, that came directly out of conversations that I'd had with Cal. And there were certain choreographies that he directed during the film. So yeah, he was a physical comedy consultant - and really I just love Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, and I admire that skill. So this was an opportunity for us to explore that, and it makes sense because Spider-Man has that physical foolishness and fun, so that's really exciting to be able to explore.

Did it help that Marc Webb returned to the direct?

The beauty of working with someone again and again is you start to create a shorthand. You learn to communicate very well. You start feeling like you know what they're going to say, and you respond to that. He knows when I need space; I know when he needs communication. And so we were dancing this time around. It was a nice pleasurable dance.

You filmed the previous film at the Sony lot and around LA, how was it to shoot this one in Peter Parker's actual stomping ground of New York?

Perfect, because the city is a character. It's a cliché to say that, but it's true. And there's an energy about it that you can't copy, you can't fake it. It's a breathing organism that fed us and we fed it. I loved it.



"THE TRAINING REGIMEN WAS PRETTY INTENSE. IT WOULD HAVE TO BE - I'VE GOT TO BE PRACTICALLY NAKED!"

As well as starring in the movie you're also involved in its post-production, what does that entail?

Talking about the edits, talking about the story, making sure we're all on the same page with the character. They're using me and it's great. I really appreciate it because I know the character, and probably know the journey from the inside more than anyone else, so they utilise that and they go, "So what beats are we missing? Why isn't this making sense? Do you remember anything we've taken out or we need to put back?" The editing process and the filmmaking process and the storytelling process are super interesting to me, and I love it. I love all parts of it. I don't just want to act. I want to indulge in all of it, and experience all of the other parts of the creative process. It's very exciting, and they're generous enough to bring me into it.

Amongst the returning faces are Dane DeHaan, Jamie Foxx and Paul Giamatti. How was it working with the new members of the Spider-family?

I was a huge, huge fan of Dane ever since I saw him for the first time in *Chronicle*. So I was very, very excited that he was cast. He's a real actor, a real talent. I like to be surrounded by people that are better than me. And I like to be forced to reach to be better, so that was great. As it was with Jamie and Paul, you feel like you're in good company!





MARC WEBB [DIRECTOR]

Where does *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* find Peter and Gwen?

If in the last movie Peter Parker was learning to be Spider-Man, by the beginning of this movie he is an *expert* at being Spider-Man. He's the greatest crimefighter in the world and he's having a blast doing the things that Spider-Man does. Gwen Stacy has graduated from high school and is trying to define her life in her own right, outside of Peter Parker, outside of Spider-Man. Those characters have evolved, [but] they're going to have their maturity tested in ways that are really quite profound.

One thing that everybody agreed on when the first movie was released was just how well suited to the roles Garfield and Stone were...

Emma has become an actor of great emotional depth. What is great about her is she never pushes a joke that doesn't feel real. Her humour and vitality come from a very real place, and to have that combination of wit, charm, beauty and relatability is a rare combination. I'm incredibly lucky to have her. Andrew has a capacity to feel very deeply and to transmit that on screen in a way that feels really authentic. And it's quite rare. But, beyond that, he's incredibly physically agile. He is very open and very collaborative. He's also funny and that is something that is elemental to the Spider-Man character. That trickster archetype is something he really embraced and I think is capable of executing in a way that's extraordinary.

***The Amazing Spider-Man* had some spectacular set pieces, are you upping the action stakes for the sequel?**

From the get-go, there's 20 minutes of straight-out, super-fast, really vibrant action that starts the movie. I really wanted to pull out all the stops for that. We want the movie to be a spectacle. We want people to be excited about seeing it and feel thrilled and feel that velocity and that excitement about being Spider-Man and that wish-fulfilment and that exhilaration. But you also want to have heart in it. The writers are really brilliant collaborators and they're so skilful at creating stories that explore very deeply the parts of the character that we haven't yet seen before. It's about finding a central idea that we - and the audience - can connect to. In the first movie, we talked about the missing piece. This film has to do with time. The

very first shot of the movie is a ticking clock, and the theme of the movie is you've got to value the time you have with the ones you love. It's something that's been explored in literature and in movies for many, many years, but it's really relatable and deeply resonant. There's a speech that Gwen gives at the beginning of the movie - her graduation speech - where she says, "Time is luck." And that's a notion that is present throughout the film.

We've already had *The Lizard*, and now it's *Electro* taking centre stage, how do you and the writers go about selecting which villains to use in each movie?

There's a parallel. There's always something similar between Peter Parker and the villains he goes up against. Peter Parker's an outsider and so is Max Dillon. Dillon has a psychotic part of his brain that makes him profoundly evil, but it was really important for us to understand and have some empathy for that character. I think Jamie Foxx acquitted himself in a brilliant way and helped define Max as not just an idea, but as a real human so you understand why he's doing these things. The trajectory of that character is fascinating. At the beginning, Spider-Man saves Max Dillon and knows his name and Dillon is thrilled by that. He's recognised by somebody who's a hero and he becomes Spider-Man's biggest fan. But by the end of the movie, he's Spider-Man's biggest foe and gives him an enormously dangerous battle, which was something really fun to play with in that character.

And *Electro*'s not the only antagonist you're throwing at Peter Parker...

Paul Giamatti's playing Aleksei Stryevich, who's becoming The Rhino. But if there's gonna be one evil force that has a lot of different faces, it's Oscorp. Oscorp is the evil empire from which all dark things in the Spider-Man universe emerge.

Talking of Oscorp, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* will also reintroduce the character of Harry Osborn to the canon...

Yeah, this Harry Osborn is brilliant. He's a very, very smart guy and the heir apparent to the Oscorp empire. And he's shrewd, but he's also bound to Peter Parker by the absence of their fathers. They've both been dumped, in a way, by their parents, which gives them a great bond.

In a refreshing move you've decided to eschew shooting the movie on digital in favour of good old 35mm film. What promoted the switch?

Yes, we shot it in 35mm anamorphic film. I discussed it with Dan Mindel, our cinematographer, and I'm just a big fan of film. I shot my first movie, *(500) Days of Summer*, on film and then we shot the last one on digital, which was fine for what we were trying to achieve. But I love film. I love the way it's projected; I love how flattering it is on people's skin and I like the way it handles light. There's something about film, and anamorphic film in particular, that endows what's on screen with an epic quality. You feel like you're watching something important when you're shooting on film.

What can you tell us about *The Amazing Spider-Man 3*?

I imagine Oscorp will play a part in it.

Anything else?

That's all I can say.

"THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT SHOOTING ON ANAMORPHIC FILM THAT ENDOWS WHAT'S ON SCREEN WITH AN EPIC QUALITY. YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE WATCHING SOMETHING IMPORTANT."

JAMIE FOXX [ELECTRO]

Electro marks the first time you've played a villain...

I've played bad guys. I've never played a real villain. Like I was a bad guy in *Dreamgirls*, and when asked, "Should we soften him up?" I said, "No. I want to be a real music dude and real music dudes don't care about artists." But playing a villain in this sense, you get to colour outside the lines. You get to say the cool lines! I asked the director to let me ad-lib stuff and I came up with, "Tsy bitsy spider, went up the water spout. Down came Electro and wiped the spider out!" So then I said, "Now I'm gonna try something," and I turned my back and just whistled the melody, so all that kind of stuff I could do as the villain, because there are no parameters. As the good guy, there are parameters, but that's what makes the good guy better when the villain is so crazed. I really enjoyed that, because not all villains have the cool factor. The suit I wore almost reminds you of a Lamborghini and I was thinking, wow, that's really cool!

His alter-ego on the other hand...

Before you get to Electro you have to start with Max Dillon. He's a 42-year-old guy who was married at one time, but his wife left him. He's an electrical engineer, he lives with his mom who's very doting but doesn't let him grow. So after 42 years, he just hasn't gotten his life together. Having that back story was fantastic as an actor, because when you agree to do a role like this, the question is, are there going to be moments where we get a chance to act? And luckily, that's exactly what Marc Webb wanted because it allows the CGI and everything else to be the add-on and not the life of the story. So getting with Marc and the writers, I said, "No one ever utters Max's name, but how can we take it even further than that?" So we came up with the idea that no one remembers his birthday, especially his mom, which really hurts him. I thought that was a great jumping-off point for Max Dillon to become Electro, because a lot of times these movies get going and you don't really know where all the venom and anger come from. In this case, we get an opportunity to look back at his history. He's betrayed by his mom, by society and by his job. And people can relate to that - your family betrays you, your love betrays you and then your job is messed up. When those three switches trip, it would throw anybody into weird, murky water. And so we capture the fact that no one says his name ever, and then all of a sudden Spider-Man says, "Hey, Max, you're my friend, you're my eyes and ears out here." He takes that like he's been in the desert all his life and someone gives him a thimbleful of water. More like a swimming pool, actually. And so when he goes off the deep end and turns into Electro, his main thing is, I don't want to hurt people. I just want Spider-Man to own up to calling me his friend. So that's why he becomes Electro, because he feels like, "Well, forget it, then. If you won't be my friend, and all these people think I'm weird or strange, I've got this power and I'm going to do harm with it now."

You mentioned Electro's suit earlier; the character has a radically different look to the version of old, was it a difficult process coming up with his new aesthetic?

It was, especially at first, because we had to take four cracks at it to try to figure out which was the right colour! We finally did the blue and everybody thought at first it was too blue, but the makeup artist said, "I think this is gonna work." And that turned out to be the version that everybody was really drawn to.

"PLAYING A VILLAIN YOU GET TO COLOUR OUTSIDE THE LINES."



How was it working with your on-screen nemesis, Andrew Garfield?

What's great about him and what makes this really cool is the fact that he takes the acting approach. It's not just, "I'm gonna get in the suit and let the suit talk." He really breaks down the scenes; he wants to go back and forth to understand where we are going to be, not just in this scene, but how it relates to the future and even further, if there are more movies down the line. So that's what you want—a person who doesn't take it for granted. Because I've worked in situations where people's attitude is, "I'm just a fly dude," and it can work. But to have something this big, where a lot is riding on it, you need a person who understands not just the outer layer, but the inside of the characters. That's what we had with Andrew.

And Marc Webb?

The man is great. Dealing with the scope and the budget of this film and that's daunting - to have to tell the story of all these people. The entire cast and crew were constantly making demands on him, and he was able to juggle all of that and also understand what the music is going to be about and everything else. And he challenged me on the acting. You know, it wasn't like a walk in the park. He really wanted me to get this. And so I thought that was fantastic for the movie because when you can really push your actors into nailing the performances, then when the explosions and everything else comes, it's just the cherry on top.





"IT WAS A QUESTION OF GOING BACK TO THE SOURCE MATERIAL. TO GET THE LARGEST EYE WE COULD GET THAT LOOKED PROPORTIONAL ON ANDREW GARFIELD'S HEAD."

DEBORAH SCOTT [COSTUME DESIGNER]

Spidey's costume has undergone some changes since the last movie...

Yes, Marc decided to go back to the classic comic book roots. In the first installment they had taken a big departure, in this one they decided to about-face and honour the original artwork. That was also really fun. It takes different forms over the years in the comic book, but you can get back to the origins of the large eyes, the shade of red and blue. In *The Amazing Spider-Man*, the eyes were kind of geometric and smaller and kind of yellow. It was a question of going back to the source material, to get the largest eye we could get that looked proportional on Andrew Garfield's head and that he could pretty much see out of. The curvature of the large lens can distort your vision and there's a screen over it that keeps you from seeing his eyes but also makes it hard for him to see out. For safety's sake there were some stunts where we had to remove the eyepieces so he could see and then CG them back in. You want to have clear vision; you don't want to add any danger. Plus, looking out of a covered lens for a long time can

give you a headache! Making a suit like that is a huge juncture between the aesthetic and the art and the practicality of how to make it function - so you can move and get in and out of it and see and feel your hands. Those things need to meet. We accomplished a lot of mobility in the suit.

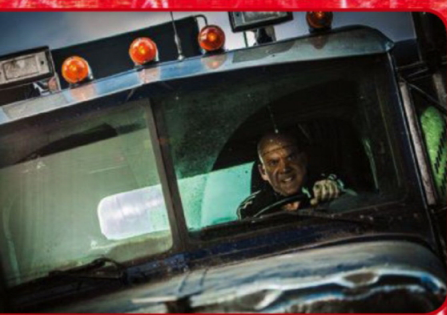
The biggest departure in terms of costume is Electro, how hands on were you in developing the new look?

Before I joined the movie there had been concept artists working on ideas. I took the basis of those and designed the costume along with Jose Fernandez at Iron Head, who manufactured it. He has a lot of experience and skill working with super heroes. The Electro costume was molded rubber. God love Jamie Foxx for wearing it. It was not the most comfortable thing. It is tailored toward the person's dimensions in every way. It's very three-dimensional. First you do a whole body cast, then you do a 3D scan. It's an amazing thing. You have full full-size figure, and you build the costume on that to their exact dimensions. So it's not like wearing a leotard; it's like a custom-fitted version of your own skin. It's very science-fiction to be able to do that. It takes it to another level.

How do you approach the less heightened characters like Gwen Stacy?

Gwen is kind of based on the first movie, taking into account what she would be like two years after that. She's an Upper East Side New York girl. She appreciates fashion and has a certain sense of style. We took those elements and made her a little bit more mature, a little more worldly in terms of fashion. But we also kept in mind that as much as the characters are human, because it is a comic-book story, there are elements you have the leeway to make slightly cartoonish in whatever way you define that. You could put odd colour combinations together, make things more graphic. You can push it a little bit from reality. That's kind of fun. A little bit more perfect or odd, depending on the character.





JAMES ARMSTRONG [STUNT COORDINATOR]

A Spider-Man project must be tremendously challenging for a stunt team...

This movie was enormous, and because of the scale of what was required every day, whether it be wire work, vehicle work, or just general ground-pounding with stuntmen or actors - you never could rest. There was always something we were prepping for the day or for a few weeks out, and I would say I'm proud of how well it went and what's left on film to look at, and I'm proud of the entire team. And also my father [Andy Armstrong] - I'm very proud of him and the scale of some of his ideas, because I'm second generation and I have a tendency to try to pull things back and keep the team as safe as possible. I think it creates a good balance with my father and me - pushing the envelope, yet keeping it safe.

How many people make up your crew?

Well over 200.

Holy moly!

It's great when it's all done and you can say, "Whew. We did it." But when you're in the trenches, you don't swallow for like nine months [laughs].

"YOU HAVE TO KEEP ANDREW SAFE - IT'S LESS A QUESTION OF ABILITY THAN SENSIBILITY. AND IF HE GETS INJURED, THEN WE'RE ALL OUT OF WORK!"

Of all the stunts in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, which are your particular favourites?

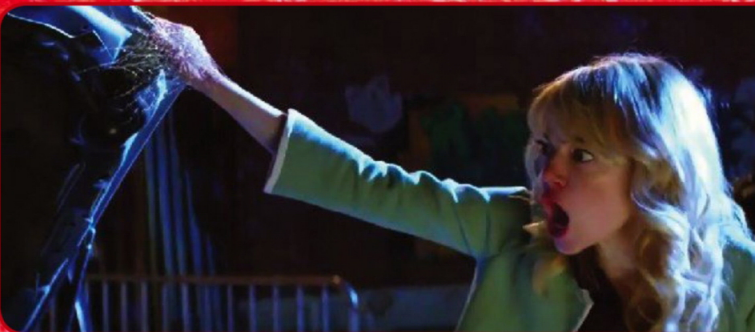
I'm always extremely proud of the swings. You have a man literally step off a surface and swing into the frame and let go. It's cool to do that and then tie it in with different vehicles. It's all very fun. It gives you a lot of pride to watch the whole movie and know that everyone was safe and yet it was still photogenic and looked good. We're very lucky to do what we do.

Does Andrew Garfield pitch in with the stunt work?

Our primary intention is to get Andrew, or Emma, or whoever is called for, to do it themselves if possible, and then from that we determine how we can facilitate the stunt in different shots. We can add two double stuntmen and then have Andrew pop up, or maybe it's fine to have Andrew do it himself. You have to keep him safe - it's less a question of ability than sensibility, and if he gets injured, then we're all out of work! We spend weeks and weeks where the actors come in and work out with us and get good at different things without everyone watching and judging them. And then on set you can say, "Hey, do that thing you did," and they say, "Really? Do you think I can?" And you say, "Yeah, do it." So it's nice that you have that trust with each other.

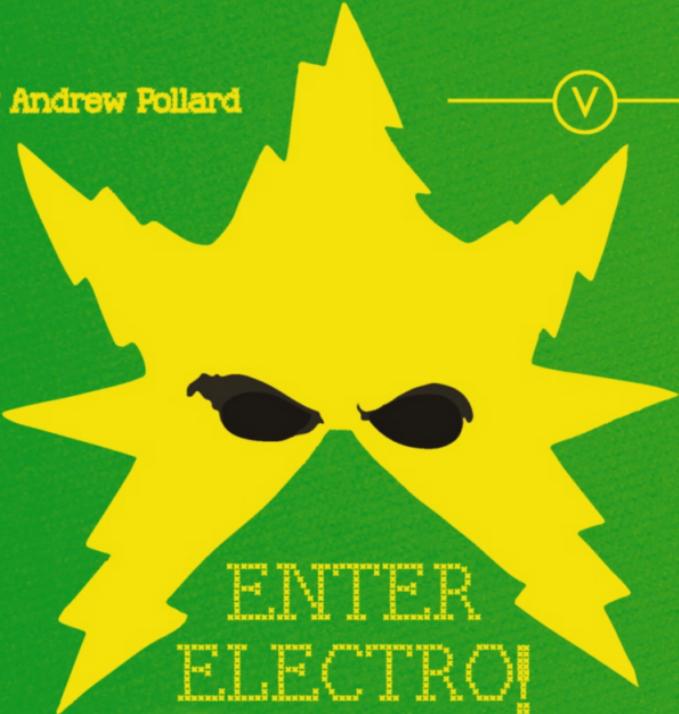


THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2 opens in UK cinemas April 18th.



by Andrew Pollard

V



ENTER
ELECTRO!



Be it in the comic book world, animation, videogames and now on the big screen, wherever there's been Spider-Man, there's been Electro.

STARBURST takes a closer look at THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2's chief antagonist...

As with so many of Spider-Man's classic villains, Electro was created by the legendary pairing of Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, making his debut in February 1964's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #9 story, *The Man Called Electro*. With his instantly-recognisable outfit and his ever-impressive powers, Electro would go on to become a member of the iconic Sinister Six and a major thorn in Spider-Man's side.

Bright Spark

Seeing as one of the most recurrent themes of the Spider-Man world is "with great power comes great responsibility," you'd think that Electro would be as responsible as David Prowse in a Green Cross Code advert. Unfortunately for ol' Webhead, Electro instead decided to take a different path; a path of crime and villainy.

Beginning life as Maxwell Dillon, son of accountant Jonathan and caring Anita, all could have been so different for the brightly coloured master of electricity. After his father deserted the family unit, Max's mother became obsessed with protecting her young son from the horrible world that lurked outside of their bubble. When the young Max informed his mum of his wish to become an electrical engineer, she was quick to shoot him down and suggest that he wasn't intelligent enough for such a career. Nothing quite like a supportive parent, right? Dissuaded from going for his dream position, Max ended up becoming a lineman for an electric company. As chance would have it, Max was one day struck by lightning. If that wasn't traumatic enough, he was holding a pair of damaged electric lines at the time. All of a sudden, the shy, anxious Max became a living generator, able to store, release and manipulate electricity. With Max using his newfound abilities and some stolen Stark

Industries tech to turn to a life of crime, Electro was born.

Over the years, the capacity of Electro's powers has varied, with the general consensus being that he can produce nearly 1,000 volts of electricity per minute, up to a maximum capacity of 100,000 volts. Certain depictions of the character, though, have given him unlimited levels of power and, when drawing electricity from other sources, he can pretty much black out an entire city. As well as being able to travel along power lines, control machinery and fire electricity bolts at the speed of lightning, this bright spark is also effectively able to cook a person from the inside out or, y'know, reheat last night's Chinese in a matter of seconds. Waste not, want not. Similarly, the power housed within his body gives Electro enough strength to lift over 450 lbs or a young Vanessa Feltz.

For long-time fans of Spider-Man, Electro is often best known for his ludicrous, eye-catching appearance. Yes, in recent years he may have taken on a different look – and that's certainly the case with Jamie Foxx's portrayal of him in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* – but to many the electricity-wielding villain will always be that guy in the bizarre yellow and green outfit with a lightning bolt on the top of his bonce.

Inferiority Complex

Given that Electro has nearly no limits on his powers, you'd expect him to be one of the more cocksure of Spider-Man's rogues. Sadly for Max Dillon, that is not the case. Brewing from a childhood of being told that he was never good enough, Max had just a tad of an inferiority complex. For somebody who Magneto saw as potentially his equal at one point, this is quite the sad tale. From Electro's debut, to his teaming up with

various villains, to his multiple attempts at taking down heroes, he is often deemed in his own mind as being nothing more than a B-list villain at best. To make his initial mark, the debuting Electro decided to use his powers to target the ever-cranky J. Jonah Jameson in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #9. Breaking in to the Daily Bugle office, Electro had his sights on the contents of JJJ's safe. Of course, ever the Spider-cynic, Jameson blamed everything on Spider-Man, claiming that this apparent Electro was nothing more than just Spider-Man taking on a new identity. When the Wallcrawler did finally catch up with Electro, the villain defeated our hero with a simple electrically charged touch. All was looking good for Electro as a main player in the villain ranks of the Marvel world, right? Well, they were, right up until Spider-Man returned with a fire hose. And some rubber gloves. Bend over, this is going to hurt. Short-circuited and embarrassed, Electro decided to try his luck against another hero: Daredevil.

Safe to say, the threat of Electro didn't prove too tricky for Matt Murdock to take down. Their first meeting saw Electro attempting to break in to the Fantastic Four's Baxter Building, where Hornhead gave the villain a timely-introduction to *The Man Without Fear*. After an unsuccessful start to his villainous ways, Electro ended up pooling his resources with several other villains, forming the Sinister Six. The team, led by Doctor Octopus, debuted in 1964's *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #1, with the M.O. being that all of the villains defeated by Spider-Man decided to get together to knock the living shit out of the cocky Wallcrawler once and for all. With Ock also bringing in Mysterio, Sandman, Vulture and Kraven the Hunter, you'd be forgiven for thinking that Spidey's goose was cooked. In ridiculous villain-logic, it was decided that rather than attack Spider-Man all at once, each villain



would go up against him one-by-one in the hope that he would become increasingly weakened. Going up against Spider-Man first was Electro, who proceeded to get schooled once more by the pesky arachnid. Another fight, another loss.

In an attempt to make a name for himself, the following years would see Electro crash Reed Richards and Sue Storm's wedding, take a payday from J. Jonah Jameson to defeat Spider-Man on national TV, take another crack at Daredevil, try the Sinister Six trick again, expand to the Sinister Seven, expand further to the Sinister Twelve (let it go already!), create the Emissaries of Evil (with Gladiator, Stilt-Man, Leap-Frog and the Matador - not to be confused with Tito Santana), get his electric ass whooped by the Falcon, get left unconscious by Wolverine, and even work with the Frightful Four. Sadly for Max Dillon, throughout pretty much all of these goings-on he was on the receiving end of some monumental beatdowns. As such, it wasn't unknown for Electro to go in to retirement at times, largely due to constantly getting defeated and also fearing for his life. In fact, the only reason he joined the Sinister Seven was because he was in fear of being killed by the deranged Spider-Man clone, Kaine, who was on a mission to kill all of Spider-Man's enemies. Even more embarrassing, Electro went as far as fainting when confronted by the Avengers after breaking several villains out of a super-prison called The Raft.

Whilst Electro's inferiority complex meant various heroes would often get the better of him, that's not to say that he didn't get his moments in the sun, and the character has been involved in some absolutely brilliant tales over the years, even if most of them ended up in defeat.

Time to Shine

As mentioned, Max Dillon made his debut in *The Man Called Electro* story arc. Whilst this gave the character an initial one-up on Spider-Man, his greatest moments were way ahead of him. With Tom DeFalco's 1997 title *Rebirth of Electro*, new life was brought to the character.

Complete with some stunning artwork by Joe Bennett, this story picked up with a retired Max Dillon seemingly content with a regular life. Unfortunately for Max, he soon found himself sinking into depression and began to lose confidence in himself once again. Remembering back to how empowered he felt after gaining his electrical abilities - which he'd lost by this point - Dillon craved them once more. Offering his services to the dastardly Rose in exchange for power, Dillon was strapped to an electric chair. Giving him even greater capabilities than he'd ever had before, Max was returned to his Electro persona.

Taking out Black Tarantula and the True Believers as repayment to Rose, it didn't take long for Electro to once again set Peter Parker's spider-sense tingling. The confident Spider-Man sought to take down Electro in ever-familiar villain-of-the-week fashion, only to be taken aback by Electro's new levels of power. Not just defeating the Wallcrawler, Electro actually forced Spider-Man to beg for mercy. Spidey was defeated. Setting his sights on bigger things, Electro decided to hold Manhattan City hostage by blackmailing it with electric bombs... and this is where things started to go south again for the oft-troubled supervillain. A prepared and focussed Spider-Man hunted down Electro, bringing X-Man with him for back-up. Using his smarts, Spidey eventually caused Electro to overload with power (who said villains were greedy?) and effectively

kill himself. Having consumed so much power and acting Shia LaBeouf-level crazy, Electro ended up plunging into the Hudson River, perishing as a result. Well, that was what was believed, at least. In reality, Electro nearly died, barely survived and ended up going into hiding.

After several returns and demises, Electro got another starring moment in Mark Waid and Paul Azaceta's *The Gauntlet* arc, which began in 2010's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #612. Whilst there had been a few attempts at giving Electro a new look over the years, this returning Max Dillon featured enough lightning bolt scars to make Harry Potter swoon with jealousy. The cause of these scars were explained as them being burns as a result of his powers over the years and the very simple fact that Electro was getting on a bit. In fact, his age began to play a big part in this particular arc, as his venture into middle age caused his powers to become erratic. Struggling to control his formidable powers, Electro turned to the rarely seen Mad Thinker for assistance.

The Gauntlet reintroduced several classic Spider-Man villains, but Electro's arc is one of the standout moments of the overall story. As mentioned, his powers were now beyond his control and things had gotten so bad that his mere touch was deadly to those around him. With his depression turning to anger at the world around him, Electro went about becoming a man of the people. Bringing outcasts and misfits together, the electrically charged supervillain creates the Power to the People group. Their first target? The New York Stock Exchange and new Daily Bugle head, Dexter Bennett. In a new spin on the character, Electro began to be championed in the media as a positive influence. Now it doesn't take the ability of spider-sense to guess that all may not be



quite as well-meaning as it initially appears. Still, with the people of Manhattan City on Electro's side, he went on to instigate a full-scale riot on the steps of the Bugle.

After another defeat at the hands of the Webhead, this is where the weakened Electro would turn to Mad Thinker for help. As payment for his assistance, Mad Thinker convinced Electro to attack Bennett and obtain some 'funding' from him. With Electro threatening that the people of Manhattan City would strike, not to mention his physically imposing nature, Bennett gave in to the demands put on him, paying Electro off. So, Electro gives Mad Thinker a wedge of cash as a swap for his returning powers, right? Not quite, as things went a little too far and Electro ended up becoming an actual living lightning bolt. With this new level of power flowing through his body, Electro defeated the Wallcrawler in an instant then turned his attention once again towards Dexter Bennett. Using his new position as a man of the people, Electro convinces the citizens of Manhattan City to turn off all electrical equipment, meaning he can channel more power for himself. Seeking to find Bennett at the Bugle offices, Electro caused chaos to the building. Despite Spider-Man arriving just in time to stop Electro from killing Bennett, the damage done to the Daily Bugle was so severe that the actual offices collapsed. Escaping with the help of the Kravinoff family, Electro would live to fight another day and Spider-Man was left in no doubt that this revitalised Electro wasn't somebody to take lightly.

Different Currents

As ever with comic book characters, looks and attitudes evolve over time. For decades Electro stood out from the crowd in his

green and yellow ensemble, but recent years have seen some changes to the character's appearance; some well received, others not so (here's looking at you, blue and white get-up). In a world of alternative realities and different dimensions, Electro has been interpreted in various ways over the years.

One of the more notable alternative Electros is the 'Ultimate' version of the character. You know the story by now: Marvel launched their fresher, younger, Ultimate line to put a 2000 spin on their characters. Ultimate Electro was not the result of a random accident this time around, but instead was a bioengineering product created by Justin Hammer. Seen as a sellable asset, Electro was sold to the Kingpin in exchange for a property development contract. Similar to his regular Earth-616 version, the Ultimate Electro would butt heads regularly with Spider-Man, suffering a multitude of defeats at the webbed-hand of the Wallcrawler. Again, like the regular Electro, this version would join the Ultimate world's Sinister Six, cleverly dubbed the Ultimate Six. Aside from the usual scuffles with the usual suspects, Ultimate Electro was involved in the heartbreaking *Death of Spider-Man* story. Along with Norman Osborn/Green Goblin, Kraven the Hunter, Vulture, Doctor Octopus and Sandman, Electro was present at the death of an icon. Still, in typical Electro fashion, things didn't go all to plan for him as he took several shots to the chest from bally old Aunt May. Presumed dead, Ultimate Electro would later return to tangle with the new Spider-Man, Miles Morales.

The MC2 world saw Max Dillon taking on certain new responsibilities – i.e. he was a father. With an emotionally uneasy daughter, Allison Dillon, this world's Electro has to be a father and a supervillain, even turning to Spider-Man for assistance when his

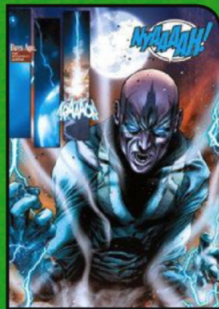
daughter becomes the villainess Aftershock (not to be confused with those silly spots that you're to gargle for 90 seconds). Similar to Electro, this world's Spider-Man also has a daughter of his own, Spider-Girl, who is brought in to deal with the Aftershock issue. In typically tragic Max Dillon style, the troubled father and daughter's relationship is massively hindered by the fact that their powers cause them both extreme pain when they touch each other.

As well as the Ultimate and MC2 versions of Electro, we've also seen different versions, if not ever-so-samey, in *Spider-Man: Reign*, the *House of M* world and the massively popular *Marvel Zombies* line of stories. Safe to say, none of these versions of Max ever really amounted to anything of note. Poor lad. Maybe he just needs to get himself a better agent.

Electric Avenue

Not content with his comic book appearances, the character of Electro has also appeared in several TV shows and video games.

First up for the master of electricity was an appearance in the 1967 *Spider-Man* cartoon, voiced by Tom Harvey, where he was on the hunt for some fat cash. With things coming to a head in an amusement park, Spider-Man ended the threat of Electro with some newly designed specialist webbing. He would later return, accompanied by Vulture and Green Goblin, but a clash of egos would lead to his demise this time out. These appearances would be followed up by a brief appearance in the *Dr. Doom's Day* episode of *The Marvel Superheroes Show* and then we'd get a couple of appearances in the *Spider-Man* and his *Amazing Friends* series, voiced by Allan Melvin.



With the '90s came some seriously cool superhero shows. Whilst DC was being represented by Warner Brothers' *Batman: The Animated Series* and *Superman: The Animated Series*, Marvel and Fox gave viewers *X-Men* and *Spider-Man*. Even though certain elements and storylines were tweaked or omitted from *Spider-Man* (such as the lack of Gwen Stacy), Electro did get to appear, this time voiced by Philip Proctor. First appearing in Season 5's *Six Forgotten Warriors* arc, this Electro looked very familiar but wasn't actually Max Dillon. Instead, the powers that be had this version of the character be Rheinholt Schmidt, the son of the Red Skull and the stepbrother of the Chameleon. Why would such a character be held off until the fifth season, we hear you say? Well, that would be down to James Cameron's long-discussed *Spider-Man* film. At the time, it was claimed that Cameron's Spidey flick would see the Sandman and Electro as the film's villains. As a result, the pair were initially left out of the animated show. When Electro did appear, certain parts of his origin and character were drawn from the Electro that appeared way back in the day in Captain America's 1950s Atlas Comics run, despite that character having literally no link to the *Spider-Man* villain of the same name. As *Spider-Man* was followed by the fairly awful *Spider-Man Unlimited* series, Electro would also make an appearance in this futuristic Counter Earth-based series. Voiced by Dale Wilson, this version of Electro is a kind of man/eel hybrid who is a guard with beef for the Wallcrawler.

With the new millennium came a new animated show for *Spider-Man*, as 2003 saw MTV give viewers *Spider-Man: The New Animated Series*. Much like the Ultimate line of comic books, this new series sought to introduce a refreshed *Spider-Man* and supporting characters. In this telling of the tale, Max Dillon, voiced by Ethan Embry, is

a fellow ESU student of Peter Parker's. In typically student fashion, Max gained his electrical powers after a night on the pop left him covered in random chemicals. If this wasn't bad enough, the chemical-covered Dillon was then struck by lightning, turning him into Electro. Throughout the series' blink-and-you'll-miss-it run, Electro would go up against *Spider-Man* twice, with the last battle ending with Electro stuck inside a battery.

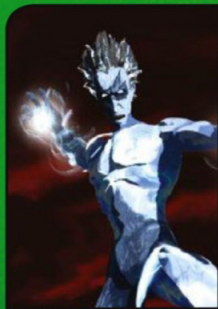
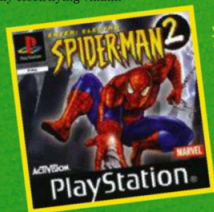
An unknown gem to some, 2008 brought *The Spectacular Spider-Man* series. A brilliant, quirky telling of *Spider-Man*'s early years, this is seen as the best *Spider-Man* animated series by most Spidey-fans. Here we find Max Dillon, voiced by Crispin Freeman, to be a mild-mannered friend of Dr. Curt Connors. Working as an electrical repairman, Dillon is electrouted and thrown into a tank of electric eels. When he emerges, he becomes Electro. Technically, though, he only took on the Electro title when the Wallcrawler dubbed him that during one of their initial meetings. This version of Electro originally starts off wanting to be cured of his new powers, seeking assistance from Doc Connors. Whilst he struggled to cope with his powers, by the end of *Spectacular*'s two-season run he was perfectly comfortable in the role of Electro.

Following on from *Spectacular Spider-Man*, Disney XD introduced *Ultimate Spider-Man* in 2012. Focusing on the young Peter Parker and friends such as Luke Cage, Iron Fist, White Tiger and Nova, this series has been as equally celebrated as it has been panned. Dubbed too kid-friendly by some quarters, *Ultimate Spider-Man* is nothing if not entertaining. Again though, with a new *Spider-Man* show comes a new version of Electro, this time voiced by Christopher Daniel Barnes. Throughout his several appearances on the show, Electro has been seen adorned in his original green and yellow

attire and also in his more serious 'Ultimate' costume. This version of the character has also joined fellow villains in signing up to Doc Ock's Sinister Six in a combined effort to take down *Spider-Man*. Of course, with Webhead having various superheroes and S.H.I.E.L.D. to call in as back-up, Electro and the Sinister Six haven't had much luck in their attempts to rid the world of *Spider-Man* as of yet.

Away from the TV world, Electro has found himself appearing in plenty of video games over the years. Taking the lead in 2001's *Spider-Man 2: Enter Electro*, the manipulator of electricity has also appeared across various formats in the likes of *Spider-Man: The Video Game*, *Spider-Man: Mystério's Menace*, *Spider-Man: Return of the Sinister Six*, *The Amazing Spider-Man vs The Kingpin*, *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance 2*, *Spider-Man: Friend or Foe*, *Spider-Man: Web of Shadows* and *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions*.

So with such a history and so many appearances over the years, now it's over to Jamie Foxx to see what spark he can bring to Max Dillon in Marc Webb's *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. Here's hoping this latest incarnation of the character makes for a truly electrifying villain.



LOVEABLE ROGUES

Quite simply put, along with Batman, Spider-Man has the greatest rogues' gallery in the comic book world. With Spidey having faced the Lizard in **THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN** and going up against Electro, the Rhino and the Green Goblin in this month's sequel, here's a guide to some of the other major players we can expect to see opposing the Wallcrawler in future instalments of Sony's rebooted Spider-franchise...

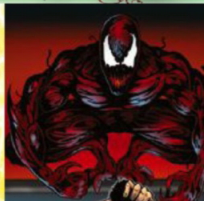
Black Cat

Felicia Hardy is essentially Marvel's version of Catwoman. A cat burglar who just so happens to have an ever-so flirtatious relationship with a superhero, Black Cat is long overdue a cinematic appearance, having first come to life in July 1979's *The Amazing Spider-Man #194*. Even though at times she knows Spider-Man's secret identity, Black Cat only has eyes for Spidey, not Peter Parker!



Carnage

Whilst Eddie Brock's Venom sought to redeem his actions at times, Carnage is just simply a piece of work. When Cletus Kasady debuted in 1991's *The Amazing Spider-Man #344* he was already depicted as a murderous psychopath. Add the alien symbiote to the mix and you have a villain of serious stature. At times, Carnage is so lethal that he makes Venom look like an Andrex puppy in comparison.



Chameleon

A master of disguise, the Chameleon debuted back in *The Amazing Spider-Man #1*. Initially known as Dmitri Nikolayevich, it was revealed that the character was also known as Smerdyakov Kravinoff, the half-brother of Kraven the Hunter. With his main power being simply a master of disguise, the Chameleon has caused plenty of confusion for Spider-Man since his introduction.



Doctor Octopus

Otto Octavius is a crazed genius who just so happens to have four mechanical arms attached to his being. Debuting in 1963, Ock is right up there with the Green Goblin as being Spider-Man's most famous foe. In recent times, his mind has inhabited the body of Peter Parker/Spider-Man as he strives to become a 'superior' Spider-Man to the one he has gone up against over the decades.





Hobgoblin

Debuting later than many on this list, the Hobgoblin first appeared in 1984's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #238. Created by Roger Stern as an alternative to the Green Goblin, Hobby had similar tools at his disposal. Over the years, Hobgoblin has been portrayed by a plethora of wrong-uns, such as Roderick Kingsley, Ned Leeds, Jason Macendale and Phil Urich.



Kingpin

Throughout the years, Wilson Fisk, aka the Kingpin, has tormented Spider-Man, Daredevil and the Punisher. Debuting in July 1967's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #50, this physically-imposing criminal mastermind would often find others to do his bidding, although the Kingpin was never afraid to get his hands dirty when it was called for.



Kraven

Sergei Kravinoff first went on the hunt in August 1964's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #15. An expert hunter with super strength, speed, reflexes, stamina and senses, Kraven has set his sights on capturing Spider-Man for years. In fact, one of the all-time greatest comic book stories was *Kraven's Last Hunt*, where, after burying Spider-Man, he commits suicide, satisfied with his life's work.



Morbius

Created by Roy Thomas and Gil Kane, Dr. Michael Morbius PhD debuted in October 1971's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #101. With the Comics Code Authority relenting on their vampire ban, Marvel seized the opportunity to introduce Morbius, an almost relentless vampire who had to feed on human blood to survive, putting him at odds with Webhead.



Mysterio

Using the wonders of special effects and illusions, Quentin Beck first appeared as Mysterio in June 1964's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #13. Looking like a fishbowl-wearing Paul Daniels, Mysterio would trick and fool the Wallcrawler on many occasions, whether it was Beck, Daniel Berkhart or Francis Klum in the outfit.

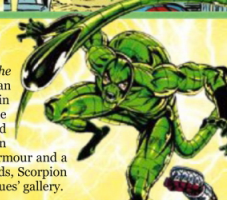
Sandman

Starting off as William Baker in September 1963's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #4, it wouldn't take long for the character to start going by the name Flint Marko. After an accident on a nuclear testing site, Marko becomes Sandman; a villain able to turn his body into any mass or shape of sand. At times, Sandman would go on to assist Spidey over the years, floating between sympathetic good guy and lethal bad guy.



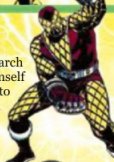
Scorpion

Debuting in December 1964's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #19, Mac Gargan would go on to become a major pain in Spider-Man's arse over time. By the next issue he had become Scorpion and later on in time he would even take on the Venom gig. With hard-as-nails armour and a tail that fired various damaging liquids, Scorpion is a classic member of Webhead's rogues' gallery.



Shocker

Herman Schultz is a clever man. First appearing in March 1967's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #46, he had created himself a suit that was literally impenetrable and impossible to grip. Added to this, he also had devices strapped to each arm that fired out concentrated air blasts that could cause major problems for Spider-Man or anyone else that Shocker would come up against.



Venom

Since technically debuting in 1984's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #252, Venom has caused untold chaos in the life of Peter Parker. After Parker rejected the alien symbiote, it found solace with Eddie Brock. Giving Brock knowledge of Parker's dirty little secret and enhancing his physical abilities, the symbiote combined with Brock's rage to create a monster known as Venom. As well as Eddie, Mac Gargan (aka Scorpion) and Flash Thompson have also been Venom at certain points.



Vulture

Taking flight way back in May 1963's *The Amazing Spider-Man* #2, the Vulture has been a prominent Spider-baddie for 60+ years now, not to mention a key member of the Sinister Six. Using a protective harness to give him the power of flight, Adrian Toomes is the most famous Vulture. Others, such as Blackie Drago, Clifton Shallot and Jimmy Natale, have also taken on the mantle at times.



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WORLD WIDE WEB

THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL WORLD OF SPIDER-MAN MERCHANDISE

by Jack Bottomley

Spider-Man made his first ever appearance way back in 1962, and since that point has only grown into more of a pop culture icon. Not fitting into the traditional mould, Spider-Man was a far zipplier hero, fighting outlandish rogues and not afraid to take the mickey while doing it. Spider-Man may be the uber-confident crime fighter but his alter-ego Peter Parker is a whole different kettle of fish. As Spider-Man he is a protagonist that we can get behind, because Peter Parker is exactly like many of us, namely a geek (say it loud and proud!) It is no wonder then that the character was a revolutionary cog in comic books and that in over 50 years of existence has been responsible for billions of dollars in merchandise sales across the world.

From the character's comic introduction, to his 1967 TV debut (in the original animated series), to the first cinematic Spider-Man movie in 2002, the character has been integrated into not only American culture but culture in general. The characters, backstory and costume have all become internationally well known and despite the complications of ownership (specifically for film - Sony has the rights to the Spidey movies), Spider-Man is up there with DC's Batman and Superman as one of the most profitable superheroes ever. It is with this in mind that Starburst takes a look at the mad, mad world of Spider-Man merchandise.

A wise man once said, "with great power, comes great responsibility"; what he didn't mention was the barmy fandom such responsibility brings! For every action figure there is a toothbrush, for every video game there's a toaster, for every poster there is a toilet roll. Alongside such official products some fan-made oddities have appeared too, such as a prosthetic Spider-Man fishing arm (Google it) and even Spider-Man nipple tassels (don't Google it!) The world of our favourite web-slinging New Yorker is chock full of brilliance but also comes replete with a range of products and tie-in items so odd and bizarre they'd make Mysterio's fish bowl ache. However, instead of listing them all, your friendly neighbourhood Sci-Fi/Horror/Fantasy magazine has listed our favourites from across the character's 50+ year history. (This seemed a better option because listing everything would have taken more copies of Starburst than Dr. Curt Connor's IQ count!)

So with that said, here are a selection of 20 peculiar and perfect pieces of Spider-Man themed merchandise and products, that anyone would swing across the city to get hold of. Well, mostly...

SPIDER-MAN ACTION FIGURE (1974)

Preceded by the Captain Action Spider-Man accessory figure (worth a pretty penny nowadays), this iconic '70s toy was the first real Spidey figure. Standing at 8" and with a sewn costume, this figure was hugely popular and it is not hard to see why. Yes future figures have been more intricate, fancy and filled with accessories and gizmos, but this item, from the legendary Mego Toy Company, will linger as one of the most beloved.



TALKING SUPER SOFTIES SPIDER-MAN (1974)

Mego's Talking Super Softies didn't prove popular and only lasted one year; such a failure was the line, many weren't even shipped. Yet this Spider-Man toy in particular is a piece of merchandise history many would die to get their mitts on. By today's standards it's primitive and dusty, with its draw string vocals, but Spider-Man's gift of the gab has always been a defining character trait, so mix that with a cuddly doll to take to bed and you have a pretty comfortable blend. "I'll Get You, Green Goblin!"

SPIDER-MAN RADIO (1978)

Radios have certainly moved on since this was released, but this neat little portable from Hong Kong company Amico is quite the find nowadays. Fashioned in the visage of our arachnid hero's noggin, this AM radio is undeniably nostalgic.



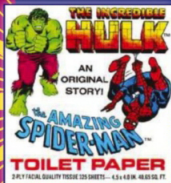
SOLAR POWER TOY TOILET SPIDER-MAN READING BOOK

Sometimes something is made and asking "why?" isn't quite enough. So is the case for this curious, erm, toy? It features cutesy big head Spider-Man sat on a toilet, reading a book and better yet he is solar powered and nods in the light. Of Chinese origin, this odd item is part of a series that includes Mickey Mouse and Winnie the Pooh (oh, the irony). This piece of merchandise seems to have been conceived in the combined haze of creativity, fizzy drinks and mind-altering substances.



SPIDER-MAN AND HULK TOILET TISSUE (1979)

In keeping with the unexpected bathroom vibe that has crawled into this piece, we have this next item. The only brand of toilet roll that could replace a newspaper, this meeting of the lean and the green heroes was needlessly well made. All that was needed was a simple pic of either hero but no, this roll is decorated by comic strips that back then were heading to the rear but are now collectable gear!



SPIDER-MAN LIP BALM

When ol' Webhead kissed Mary Jane in 2002's *Spider-Man*, do you think he had chapped lips? Of course not, and this product is the reason why! (Seriously, what's with all the Spidey cosmetic tie-ins out there?! You don't see Captain America flogging lipply!)



CLASSIC SPIDER-MAN COSTUME

Throughout our lives, almost all of us have donned a superhero costume, even current-day Spider-Man. Andrew Garfield started out wearing these iconic threads. Forget those naff paper facemasks, this was the real deal! Despite the fact the costume doesn't enable you to climb the walls or lift cars, the Spider-Man costume has been a staple of the character's product history, tinkered with and made slightly more impressive through the years.

WEB SHOOTERS

Ok, so technically they don't fire a webbing compound that can hold your weight (trust us on that!), but even still, what's better than shooting streams from your wrists, pretending to incapacitate your enemies and just generally going crazy with Silly String? While many have a place in their hearts for the Web Shooter toy, most mums and dads would probably have liked to wash them down the waterspout, as they made a right bloody mess.



SPIDER-MAN VIDEOGAME

Released in 2000 for the PlayStation 1 and Nintendo 64 (remember those, folks?), this videogame encapsulated everything that is to love about Spider-Man. Witty put-downs, pop culture references (in this case to *The Warriors* and *Groundhog Day*), exciting action and even good old uncle Stan Lee doing voice-over duties. Filled with boss battles, this game was a fun childhood hit for many, it's just a shame the sequel *Enter Electro* (2001), didn't quite match up.



SPIDER-MAN ADVENTURE OUTDOOR HEROES 10" ACTION FIGURES (2002)

Everyone needs a bit of downtime, to escape the hustle 'n' bustle of the daily routine, and it appears Spider-Man is no different as this strange product shows. We've seen Spider-Man in many forms but never thought to see him decked out in archer and fisherman gear, however, this obscure duo action figure pack gives us just that. Comes complete with bow, hat and fishing rod too. Aww shucks, you're spoiling us now!



SPIDER-MAN 3 BUG VACUUM (2007)

At first glance this piece of kit looks remarkably like a gun; oh contraire - it is a bug vacuum. Yes, a bug vacuum. Surely you've heard of one of those, no home is complete without one! It's hard to imagine the *Spider-Man 3* brainstorming session that ended with somebody coming up with the idea of marketing a device that allowed kids to Hoover up insects, but it happened nonetheless. As for the fate of those poor captured creepy crawlies, read on...



SPIDER-MAN 3 BUG HABITAT (2007)

Dust off those Bug Vacuums peeps, for your very own Spider-Man themed Bug Habitat. Forget an ant farm, this is a bug city! And it comes with a base made from "The Sandman's Sand", promises the packaging! That's right, he may be a big shape-shifting lug but at least he's donated part of his body to science. Much respect, Mr. Sandman.

BEACH SPIDER-MAN (ADVENTURE HEROES, 2000)

Another figure to add to the list of the unthinkable - yes, Spider-Man is blended with *Baywatch*. Beach Spider-Man is pretty much like seeing Darth Vader don some speedos; it is hard to think a kid would choose this see-to-believe figure over a standard costumed Spider-Man. Yet this is an irresistible bit of merchandising tosh - take your beach ball and go home Spidey, you've been knocked about too much by Rhino.



LEGO SPIDER-MAN (2002-2004, 2012-NOW)

To tie-in with Sam Raimi's movie, LEGO opened up a Spider-Man theme and the results were reliably great. Combining LEGO with anything usually increases its XP points for being awesome and this was no different. Even if the LEGO Spider-Man figure was just too cute for its own good. One of our favourite playsets has to be the 2004 #4855 Spider-Man's Train Rescue, which features a LEGO incarnation of Alfred Molina's Doctor Octopus. Along with the recent reboot film series, Spider-Man LEGO returned in 2012 but was based on the *Ultimate Spider-Man* TV series instead of the movies.



SPIDER-MAN HUMIDIFIER

Well you know how the saying goes, nothing says heroic like a humidifier.

The Dr. Fresh Marvel range offered up many tie-in doozies, from the Infectguard Spiderman Clip On Hand Sanitizer (very swish) to the sought-after Spider-Man Plaque Detector. Well if you jump about in that costume all day, you need to keep an eye on personal hygiene! However, this neat humidifier shows that Spidey not only keeps you safe outside the home, but also inside it too!



SPIDER-MAN PIZZA PRINTS

For all of you out there that have ever thought, "my Pizza could do with a crimefighter on it" (no? Just us then), here you go! These Spider-Man Pizza Prints ensure that your favourite wall crawler can get down off the walls and sit atop your tomato cheese sphere of deliciousness. Bit traumatic for kids though, isn't it, "come on have a bit of your pizza, you've got Spider-Man's upper torso".



SPIDER-MAN TOASTER (2012)

Web Heads become bread heads in possibly the most exciting piece of merchandise to come out of *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Yes, it's a toaster - stay with us - but it's one which prints a spider logo on to your bread! Even if the effect will be somewhat diminished by the butter and jam spread over it, this is still the best use of bread since the bomb deadenning technique used in *Wallace & Gromit's A Matter of Life and Death*.



INCREDIBLES SPIDER-MAN BED COVER

Ok, Ok, so bed covers admittedly were always that Christmas gift you'd be a bit flummoxed by when you were a kid, but at some point pretty much all of us have had our place of slumber decorated with our favourite comics, films and TV shows. This particular bed cover though takes it to a whole new level, basically allowing your bed to become one huge Spider-Man, with straps so you can move his arms!



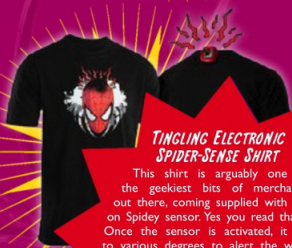
ANATOMIA SPIDER-MAN

To say this Spider-Man doll is the weirdest item listed is arguable but it is certainly the most expensive, costing a whopping \$2,300 (US). Made by Paris-based Artist/Filmmaker Illanes Jean-Philippe, this doll shows Spider-Man split down the centre with his insides (skeleton and organs) on display. The intention being to show that Spider-Man is human at his core and thus any of us can be heroes is a noble aim for his doll art, but maybe the fluffy viscera is a bit much for young web-slingers everywhere!



TINGLING ELECTRONIC SPIDER-SENSE SHIRT

This shirt is arguably one of the geekiest bits of merchandise out there, coming supplied with a clip-on Spidey sensor. Yes you read that right. Once the sensor is activated, it vibrates to various degrees to alert the wearer of approaching intruders and how close they are (working from up to 5 feet away), very useful for providing heroic confidence when walking down dark alleys. Hey, it's gotta be easier than being bitten by (and first stumbling upon) a radioactive spider!



OUTSIDE THE BOX



All the news from
the worlds of
Doctor Who with
Paul Mount

DOCTOR WHO
IN ACTION

Character Options, licensees for official *Doctor Who* action figures since the series returned in 2005, have just released the second wave of figures in the new 3.75 inch range which last year replaced the familiar, popular 5 inch range. The new figures, now available in all the usual outlets, are inspired by the 50th Anniversary special episode 'Day of the Doctor' and Matt Smith's Christmas swansong 'Time of the Doctor' and include new figures based on Matt Smith's Doctor and his current companion Clara, a screaming Weeping Angel figure, two new Daleks (Assault and Imperial Guard) and, new to the 3.75

inch range, the Zygon, the classic 1970s alien resurrected for 'Day of the Doctor'. The first figure depicting latest Doctor Peter Capaldi, in his post-regeneration Matt Smith costume, is also now available.

A special 'Other Doctor' boxset has also been released in the 5 inch range, depicting the 'missing' Doctor as played by John Hurt in 'Day of the Doctor' and features the 'other' Doctor's sonic screwdriver and 'The Moment', the ultimate Time Lord weapon which the 'other' Doctor intended to use to bring an end to the Time War. The set also includes an alternate Eighth Doctor head which will allow you, should you feel sufficiently gruesome, to pull off John Hurt's head and replace it with Paul McGann's. Oh, the ignominy...

NEW DOCTOR
WHO DVD?

With the DVD/Blu-ray of the fiftieth anniversary episode 'Day of the Doctor' still selling well weeks after its release, rumours abound of a 'special edition' release of the episode appearing later in the year. The British Board of Film Classification has recently 'cleared' for release a number of previously-unreleased 'special features' including the two specially filmed introductions to the episode which were screened prior to its hugely successful cinema screenings last November, BBC3's two-hour 'talking heads'-style 'Ultimate Guide to the Doctor Who' and BBC2's 'The Science of Doctor Who', hosted by popular

TV physicist Brian 'things can only get better' Cox. However, the BBC have yet to announce any plans for a special release for the episode or, indeed, any future *Doctor Who* DVD releases now that the 'classic series' range is more or less complete.



CHRISTOPHER BARRY OBITUARY

Christopher Barry, the longest serving director on the original BBC TV run of *Doctor Who* passed away on 7th February after an escalator fall at a shopping precinct near his Oxfordshire home. Christopher worked on the *Doctor Who* intermittently between 1963 and 1979, most notably on several of the series' key stories. He directed episodes of Terry Nation's debut serial 'The Daleks', the two-part serial 'The Rescue' in 1965 which saw the first newcomer to the TARDIS crew as Maureen O'Brien. Vicki replaced Carole Ann Ford who had played Susan since the series began in November 1963. Patrick Troughton's debut serial 'Power of the Daleks' in 1966 and Tom Baker's debut 'Robot' in 1974. Christopher also directed the classic 1971 five-part serial 'The Daemons', often regarded as one of the very best stories from the Jon Pertwee era as well as the classic 1975 four-parter 'The Brain of Morbius'. Christopher's last contribution to *Doctor Who* was 1979's 'Creature from the Pit'.

Throughout his career Christopher Barry worked extensively on BBC TV dramas such as *Paul Temple*, *Poldark*, *Z Cars*, *Juliet Bravo* and *All Creatures Great and Small* and dabbled with science-fiction again in anthology series *Out of the Unknown* in 1965, the gritty *Moonbase 3* in 1973 and the ill-fated and short-lived *Tripods* series in 1984. He also directed the 1995 *Doctor*

Who spin-off straight-to-DVD fan film *Downtime* which reunited 'classic series' regulars Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart (Nick Courtney) and Sarah Jane Smith (Elisabeth Sladen) and reintroduced 1960s companion Victoria (Deborah Watling) and professor Travers (Jack Watling), last seen in 1968's 'The Web of Fear'. The story also introduced the character of Lethbridge-Stewart's daughter Kate, played in *Downtime* by Beverley Cressman and portrayed in two episodes by Jemma Redgrave since the character was brought in as UNIT UK's boss in the TV series in 2012.

CAPALDI ON STAGE

Peter Capaldi paid an unexpected visit, in full costume (see last issue), to the BBC Worldwide Showcase event in Liverpool last month. The event is attended by TV buyers from all around the world and allows the BBC to showcase its productions to potential interested international purchasers. With *Doctor Who* remaining one of the BBC's biggest money-spinners across the globe it was inevitable that the show would enjoy a significant presence at the event. Capaldi emerged on stage from the TARDIS to speak briefly with chat show host Graham Norton who enthused about the actor on his BBC Radio 2 Saturday morning show a few weeks later. After his appearance Capaldi said "As a lifetime follower of the show, I'm delighted to see its global success. And I'm looking forward to sharing with the world the very exciting journey the new series is taking us on."



SEASON EIGHT - CASTING UPDATE

The BBC have announced that there will be a new face aboard the TARDIS for the currently filming eighth season of *Doctor Who*. Samuel Anderson has been cast as Danny Pink, a fellow teacher working alongside Jenna Coleman's Clara Oswald at Coal Hill School which, as long time fans will remember, was where the TV adventures of *Doctor Who* began way back in 1963.

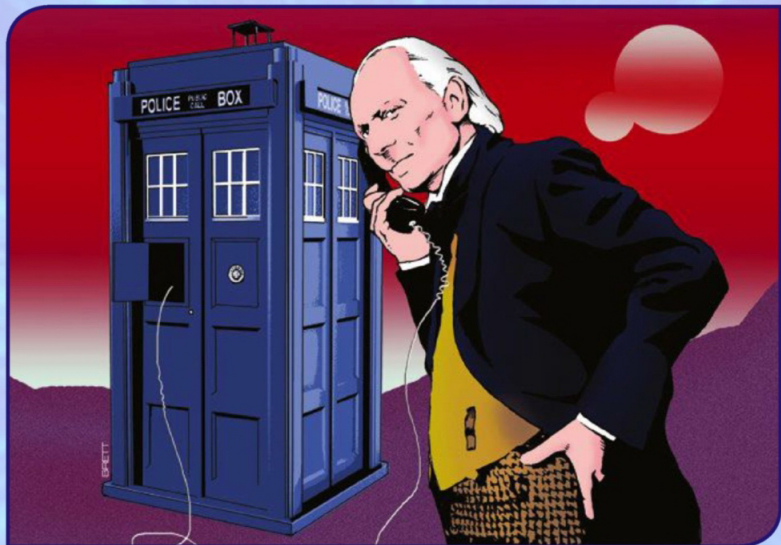
Anderson, who has previously appeared on TV in shows such as *Emmerdale*, *Gavin and Stacey* and most recently in *Death in Paradise* and on stage in 2004 National Theatre Production of *The History Boys* says of his new role: "I was so excited to join *Doctor Who* I wanted to jump and click my heels, but I was scared I might not come down before filming started. It's a quintessential part of British culture and I can't believe I'm part of it. It's an honour to be able to work alongside Peter Capaldi and Jenna Coleman (*whose big TV break was also in ITV soap Emmerdale*) and I can't wait to show people how my character becomes involved with such a fantastic duo!"

Anderson's character is believed to be a regular presence throughout the new series but current showrunner Steven Moffat is typically enigmatic about how Danny becomes involved with the Doctor and Clara and their travels in the TARDIS. "Very soon now, Sam Anderson as Danny Pink will be entering the world of the Doctor," says Moffat. "But how and why? Answers are coming later this year in Peter Capaldi's first series of *Doctor Who*!"



WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

an in-depth look
at the World of
Doctor Who by
JR Southall



The *End of the World* is a bit of an odd story out, in that it's one of the very few instances in which the Ninth Doctor actually gets to save the day. Elsewhere, he's a bit of a cosmic enabler, helping such characters as Charles Dickens, Cathica and Mickey Smith (and yes, a Tyler) to resolve dilemmas, while himself suffering from the cosmic angst that we soon came to know as Post-Time War Syndrome. On only a couple of occasions does he actually make the crucial difference himself.

It was much the same story with the First Doctor, initially, but for entirely different reasons. When the series was first devised, although it was called *Doctor Who* the name was somewhat disingenuous. The programme wasn't really about the character as much

as it was the story of the two schoolteachers' adventure, trapped in "the Ship" and never knowing where in Time and Space they might end up next. The Doctor himself was introduced very much as an anti-hero, even the villain of the piece in the very first episode, and it was some little time before he softened into the character from which would eventually spring the Doctor we know today. That first instalment in the series was filled with mysteries, some of which would take years to unfold – and some of which are still unfolding now – but right at the heart of it were the two mysterious figures that Ian and Barbara would have to learn to live with, one the schoolgirl with the unusual abilities and after whom the episode itself is named *An Unearthly Child*, and the other her strange, eccentric and even

dangerous grandfather, and it was after him that the programme took its title.

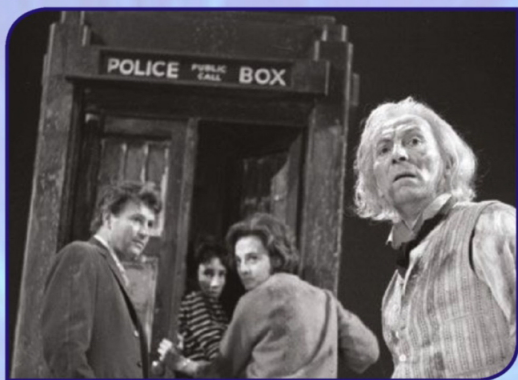
So when did Doctor Who become the hero of his own show?

I'm not entirely sure he ever does. Not in the conventional sense at least. Matt Smith's reading of Steven Moffat's Eleventh Doctor is very much the bumbling everyman (albeit the "alien" everyman), someone who finds himself involved in adventures rather than necessarily looking for them, and whose solution is generally, as he himself puts it, "Hold tight and pretend it's a plan." The series has had a long tradition of last-minute fixes by various Doctors, each of them coming up with something brilliant and clever and entirely unexpected in order to save the day – but very rarely planning their move ahead of time, or

behaving in a traditionally heroic manner while doing so. For sure, there have been Doctors (perhaps most obviously the Third, with his Venusian Aikido, and the Tenth with his overblown speechifying – and maybe even the Fifth with his rigid moral compass) who have been just a touch more aligned with your James Bonds or your intergalactic Indiana Joneses, the gadget Doctor or maybe the space-faring gentleman adventurer, but these are very much the exceptions to the rule.

But why might that be? Why is it that after kidnapping two innocent humans and threatening to crown a caveman with a rock, the character of the Doctor wasn't redeveloped along more traditional lines, into something more akin to a Captain Kirk or an Apollo than the eccentric, bohemian traveller we've grown to love? We might like our heroes flawed here in Blighty, but that doesn't mean we're incapable of coming up with more conventionally drawn characters like Bulldog Drummond and Allan Quatermain, especially in the post-War years where traditional heroism was at a premium.

The answer perhaps lies in the idiosyncratic nature of the series' early format. For although the First Doctor would go on to dispatch a would-be assassin with his bare hands in *The Romans*, not to mention almost finishing off the leader of the chain gang in *The Reign of Terror* in another rock-related incident, it would still have been possible to have redrafted him along more conventional lines in the subsequent fifty years, had it not been for the very nature of the series itself, and particularly the heavily-formatted anthology nature of the first few. There's something about never knowing quite where your adventures are going to take you that mitigates against the character developing a steady and steadfast personality, instead encouraging the Doctor to become one for whom it's almost the travel itself, the unpredictability of his destinations, that informs him. It would have been impossible for the Doctor to take on the mantle of defender of the undefended, righter of wrongs, with no notion of where and when he might end up next. If the Doctor had been



able to seek out injustice and throw himself into the task of protecting the innocent, then maybe that would have become his character early enough in the show's run that an alternative wouldn't have been allowed to establish itself first. But that wasn't the case, and by the time the second Doctor was meeting monsters on a regular enough basis to become the hero that any modern devising of the show would no doubt have created, he had already been established as something else.

Perhaps even more tellingly, the educational remit that so informed the early years of *Doctor Who* also saw the institution of the alternating forwards and backwards approach – and while it was possible for the first Doctor to be the problem-solving, wrong-righting hero character in futuristic and outer space stories like *The Keys of Marinus* and *The Web Planet*, nearly half of his adventures took place in Earth's past, and as observed in *The Aztecs*, the early mantra for these stories was that "You can't rewrite history, not one line." The Doctor and his companions became observers, basically witnesses to history on behalf of the viewing public, in stories that sought not to involve the TARDIS crew in events so much as it would the watching children – and explain the past rather than imprint the series' evolving personality upon it.

For the early years, another important factor in the character's development was the permanent fixture of a leading man among the regular cast. Initially Ian Chesterton, and thereafter Steven Taylor, Ben Jackson and then Jamie McCrimmon, there would always be another actor on hand to perform the more traditional "hero" duties, and the Doctor was originally created as a kind of "wizard" character. Someone upon whom it

might fall to resolve the plot, as often as not, but generally only on the occasions when a cerebral resolution was required. Anything more physical, more in the standard hero mould, would be given to the "principal man", Ian or Steven or Ben. Once Patrick Troughton took over and the second Doctor's relationship with Jamie developed in a different direction, the lines became more blurred and the division of labour less obvious. But by this point, the die was already cast and Troughton's Doctor became the very definition of the Doctor who solved things generally more by accident than by design, a trait he has passed on to most of his descendants in the role, and a legacy that has become one of *Doctor Who*'s core values.

All of which is not to say that we shouldn't celebrate the Doctor as a hero, of course, and perhaps more unusually, the kind of hero that relies more upon his brains than his brawn. As a character and a twentieth century archetype, he shares far more in common with his antecedent Sherlock Holmes than he does with his contemporary, the aforementioned James Bond. And that's perhaps the best reason of all to love the Doctor's antiheroic heroism; for while there will always be physical, sporting heroes, and impractically idealistic characters like Bond in fiction and in films, here on British television we can celebrate the muddling, the modest and the mid-mannered hero, the Time Traveller who sets a precedent we can all emulate and who, in spite of his alien origins and unusual biology, is a brilliant example of the kind of hero it's possible for even the most average of us to actually be. On a good day.

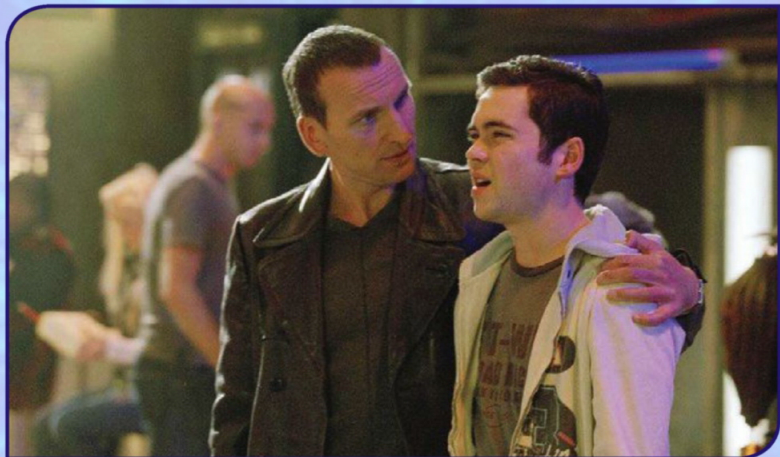
It might have all been very different if Ian hadn't stopped him from crowning that caveman, though.

Artwork by Simon Brett



DOCTOR WHO COMPANDIUM

Paul Mount with the definitive Starburst guide to the Doctor's fellow travellers



ADAM MITCHELL

When Russell T Davies set about creating the template for his 21st century Doctor Who reboot, he had a very precise vision of his 'ideal' complement of TARDIS travellers. Across its twenty-six year run the 'classic' series had experimented with any number of companions to accompany the Doctor in his adventure in Space and Time and during the 1960s the Doctor rarely travelled for long with just one chum. But with the third Doctor exiled to Earth in the 1970s, the concept of the Doctor's companion changed subtly into the 'assistant'.

In the 1970 season the Doctor was stranded on Earth by the Time Lords unable to operate his TARDIS. He found himself working for UNIT (United Nations Intelligence Taskforce) as their sometimes-reluctant scientific adviser. For a while the Doctor's ability to 'travel' was restricted to sojourns in his souped-up yellow roadster Bessie and UNIT's Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart thoughtfully allocated

the Doctor an 'assistant', someone who could, initially at least, aid him in his various scientific experiments at UNIT HQ. So it was that boffin Liz Shaw was replaced by naive trainee Jo Grant who was, in turn, replaced by independent journalist Sarah Jane Smith. For the rest of the 1970s the Doctor continued to travel, robot dogs notwithstanding, with just one companion at his side.

This was the format Davies was keen to recreate for his new series and the 2005 series of Doctor Who saw Chris Eccleston's leather-jacketed Doctor accompanied by Rose Tyler, an everygirl for the 21st century, designed not only to appeal to the notoriously sci-fi shy female audience but to represent a fairly typical modern 'council estate' teenager. But having created the 'perfect' companion for a modern Doctor, Davies couldn't resist envisaging a character who could travel briefly with the Doctor and who maybe wasn't quite so perfect. Adam Mitchell enjoyed just one proper trip aboard the TARDIS before being dumped back into the bosom of his family. The

point had been made quietly and quickly; not everyone's got the 'right stuff' for a life aboard the TARDIS.

In the sixth episode of the 2005 season, the Doctor and Rose find themselves deep under the Salt Plains of Utah in the year 2012 (so far in the future) where filthy rich industrialist Henry Van Statten has set up a subterranean museum of extra-terrestrial artefacts including, unsurprisingly, the stray Skaroan of the episode's title. Adam is a junior researcher and self-proclaimed genius and as Van Statten shows the Doctor his latest toys, Rose is perfunctorily dispatched to spend time with young Adam. Despite the fact that Rose already has a frustrated boyfriend (Mickey) waiting at home and is clearly forming a very close bond with her new friend the Doctor, Rose takes a shine to fresh-faced Adam who quickly tells her of his dream to travel amongst the stars. When the lone Dalek in the museum inevitably goes berserk and sets off on a slaughter rampage, Rose and Adam are, for a while, in its firing line and are witness

to one of the first 'Ohmygod' moments of the resuscitated series. Lazy comedians are robbed forever of an easy laugh as the Dalek effortlessly navigates a pesky flight of stairs by levitating above them.

Dozens of dead bodies later and, with the Dalek incapacitated thanks to a healthy dose of Rose's humanity, the Doctor and Rose set off in the TARDIS and, with Adam at a loose end and the museum about to be cemented over, Rose persuades the Doctor to allow Adam to join them on the TARDIS.

Their first (and for Adam, only) port of call is the space station Satellite Five, orbiting the Earth in the year 200,000 and broadcasting news and propaganda to the entire human empire. As the Doctor and Rose uncover the monstrous and alien presence directing proceedings from the mysterious Floor 500, Adam goes off on a frolic of his own. Seduced by the wealth of new technology available to him on Satellite Five, he submits himself to a medical procedure which results in a sophisticated information interface being installed into his forehead. The interface is accessed by a simple finger-click. Recognising the opportunity to make a name for himself in the twenty-first century by exploiting this rush of futuristic tech, Adam uses Rose's mobile phone (already souped-up by the Doctor) to transmit data back to his home answering machine. The Doctor, understandably, is appalled by Adam's selfishness as well as being undoubtedly stung by a flagrant breach of trust, takes Adam straight back home, destroys the answering machine and leaves the interface implant in place. Adam's mother isn't likely to be the only one reduced to a state of hysteria when his forehead suddenly opens up at the click of a finger...

Many contemporary commentators misunderstood the reason for Adam being introduced into the series at a time when the show was still finding its feet and its audience. Some thought the character 'got in the way' of the Doctor/Rose dynamic whilst others



thought he was just an insipid and uninspired attempt to give Rose an alternative 'love interest' figure. But it fell to Russell T Davies himself to explain that it had always been the intention to shake up the core TARDIS personnel and present "a rubbish companion" as a contrast to Rose, exactly the sort of companion the Doctor needed at his side post-Time War (and after over a decade and a half off the TV screen), Adam was most definitely "the companion that couldn't." Where Rose joined the Doctor to escape her humdrum world and witness the miracles and experience the terrors of the Universe, Adam couldn't see beyond the opportunity to exploit the potential of his new time-travelling status for his own good further down the line. With the Doctor making it quite clear that "I only take the best", poor Adam just had to go.

Adam was played by actor Bruno Langley who had just left ITV soap Coronation Street after a four-year stint as Todd Grimshaw, a role he returned to in 2013.

CAPTAIN JACK HARKNESS

Not many of the Doctor's companions introduced themselves to the series with the words "excellent bottom" but then few companions have gone on to make quite the enormous impact of Captain Jack Harkness, who made his first appearance two weeks after Adam Mitchell slunk off into obscurity. Jack, a square-jawed matinee idol figure in World War II greatcoat, admires Rose Tyler's jeans-clad posterior as she hangs precariously from a barrage balloon during a German air raid over wartime London. Dashing off to the rescue (in his invisible spaceship tethered to the Big Ben tower, obviously), Jack pauses only to make a similar observation to one of his stiff-upper-lip RAF colleagues. The audience might not yet be aware that Jack is destined to travel in the TARDIS intermittently as well as becoming something of a 21st century British TV icon, but they're already on notice that this is a character quite unlike any other seen in the show's then forty-year plus history.

When we first meet Captain Jack Harkness in Steven Moffat's 'The Empty Child' we're told that he's a "time agent from the 51st century" and that he's gone rogue after losing two years of his memory. Now operating as a con man, Jack is attempting to make a quick buck by selling an alien medical supplies transport ship which has crash-landed in 1940s London, releasing a cloud of nanogenes with massive transformative properties. Despite cheerily romancing Rose with champagne and Glenn Miller music, it's quite clear that Jack has a roving sexuality to accompany his roving eye. By the 51st century ancient prejudices are long gone and sexual orientation is much more fluid; as a show with a massive children's audience, Doctor Who was never going to make an 'issue' of a lead character's sexuality and Jack is often described as being 'Omni-





sexual', the suggestion being that he'll have intimate relations with virtually any sentient being. At the end of the two-part adventure Jack appears to save the day by whisking an unexploded German bomb out into space and, unable to jettison it or vacate his ship, Jack resigns himself to his fate when the bomb explodes. But before the device can detonate, the TARDIS arrives and Jack gratefully rushes aboard to become the latest member of the TARDIS crew.

Jack appears to settle quickly into his new way of life aboard the TARDIS but his time comes to an end almost as quickly as it begins. Arriving back on Satellite 5 one hundred years after their previous visit, the Doctor, Rose and Jack are quickly involved in a mass assault by the Daleks who have been manipulating the human race for decades via the communications network. During a ferocious gun battle between the Satellite's skeleton crew and an army of Daleks, Jack is exterminated, only to be resurrected when Rose Tyler accesses the secret power of 'the heart of the TARDIS', turning the Daleks to ashes but giving life back to Jack. The Doctor and Rose, unaware that Jack is alive again (and now apparently immortal), leave Satellite 5 and Jack watches despairingly as the TARDIS dematerialises.

Off-screen Captain Jack had already become a quiet sensation in the new series. The production plan had always been that Jack would return to Doctor Who in its third season; in the meantime the character was gifted an adult-orientated spin-off show called *Torchwood* which saw Jack now based in Cardiff and heading up a mismatched group of covert operatives investigating and salvaging the flotsam and jetsam which passes through a cosmic rift which runs right through the city. *Torchwood* was able to more fully exploit Jack's sexuality and although the first few episodes suggested

an irresistible attraction between Jack and new recruit Gwen Cooper (Eve Myles), storylines would eventually steer him into a relationship with the group's gopher, Ianto Jones (Gareth David-Lloyd). Other episodes revolved around various relationships Jack had enjoyed across the years with both males (most notably the outrageous Captain John, played by former *Buffy* star James Marsters) and female (the 2009 mini-series 'Children of Earth' introduces Jack's daughter Alice (Lucy Cohu)) and grandson Steven. *Torchwood* would ultimately run for four series between 2006 and 2011 but Jack wasn't done with Doctor Who. The first season of *Torchwood* ended with Jack disappearing on hearing the distant familiar sound of the 'TARDIS' engines; the thread was picked up in 'Utopia', the eleventh episode of the third Doctor Who

season where Jack, who has been waiting on Earth for over a hundred years for the Doctor to reappear, returns to the TARDIS and joins the Doctor (now played by David Tennant) and his companion Martha Jones just as the Doctor's old enemy The Master reappears. But Jack has changed and no longer craves a life of travelling in Space and Time; he opts to return to his team at Cardiff but is pressed back into service by the Doctor the following year when the Daleks launch their most audacious Earth-invasion scheme yet. The last we see of Jack in Doctor Who - to date - is in Tennant's finale when the Doctor uncharacteristically fixes Jack up with a date in a space bar. Let's not go there...

Jack was (is?) played by charismatic Scottish/American all-round entertainer John Barrowman, a lifelong Doctor Who fan whose TV career was in the doldrums until Captain Jack hurtled him back into the limelight. The effortlessly-effervescent Barrowman, in between *Torchwood*/Doctor Who duties, has become a fixture on TV screens and in British theatres, hosting quizzes and light entertainment shows for the BBC and Channel 4 and appearing annually in sold-out festive pantomimes. More recently he has been seen in popular American drama productions such as *Desperate Housewives* and, currently, the smash hit CW superhero series *Arrow*.

Captain Jack differs from most other Doctor Who companions who, once their time aboard the TARDIS is over, are never seen again and rarely referred to. But Captain Jack is still out there and whilst *Torchwood* itself is currently in limbo, Captain Jack - and certainly Barrowman who has repeatedly indicated that he'll clear his diary should the show come calling - is ready with his trademark greatcoat and preferred Webley Mk IV hand pistol. Come on, Mr Moffat, you know it makes sense... +





THE QUEST FOR PEDLER

THE LIFE AND IDEAS OF DR KIT PEDLER

THE QUEST FOR PEDLER - THE LIFE AND IDEAS OF DR KIT PEDLER

Hardback / Author: Michael Seely / Publisher: Miwk / Release Date: Out Now

Dr Christopher Magnus Howard 'Kit' Pedler is one of the great and largely unsung heroes of *Doctor Who*. Drafted into the series in 1966 by then-producer Innes Lloyd and tasked to inject a bit of real-world scientific oomph into a show which was running out of steam and drifting into fantastical whimsy, Kit found a kindred spirit in story editor Gerry Davis. Motivated by shared concerns about the unfettered nature of contemporary scientific advancement, they together created the Cybermen, one of the Doctor's most persistent and implacable enemies. Pedler himself wrote three Cybermen scripts for *Doctor Who* between 1966 and

1967 and provided the storylines for three other serials between 1966 and 1968.

But there's so much more to Dr Kit Pedler than a fairly brief flirtation with the world of *Doctor Who*, so fans expecting pages of fascinating behind-the-scenes gossip and anecdotes about the making of the series in the 1960s will be sorely disappointed. So too will fans of classic 1970's enviro-drama *Doomwatch*, which Pedler and Davis also created (the same author has written a couple of other titles which comprehensively chronicle this ground-breaking series), although, in fairness, it is covered in appropriate detail here. Because in many ways *Doomwatch*

wasn't just the name of a TV series Pedler worked on for two years (before creative differences with the producer drove him away from the third season); it was also pretty much a way of life.

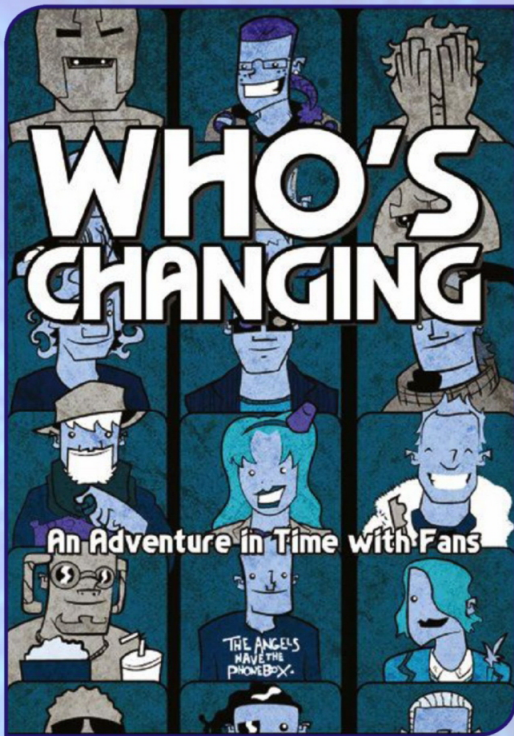
The Quest for Pedler is really a book about an extraordinary, quirky, visionary human being who recognised and appreciated the danger man represented to his own world and his environment years before such issues became headline news or trendy T-shirt slogans. Kit spent many years doing research into eye disease at London University's Institute for Ophthalmology (and setting up its electron microscopy department) before being seduced by the allure of writing for television which, in turn, led to the publication of a number of luridly titled SF novels which all shared Pedler's trademark concerns about the ecology and the perils of unchecked scientific progress. His falling-out with the BBC during the era of *Doomwatch* distanced him from the TV world until later in his life and he continued championing his dream of humanity leading a less frenetic and more natural existence. At one point he was part of a consortium bidding to create an idyllic alternative technology centre on the banks of the Thames.

Michael Seely's book is a staggeringly thorough piece of work, exhuming scripts, lecture notes, obscure magazine articles and interviews, and with contributions from many of Pedler's family and friends. Literally no stone has been left unturned in presenting an exhaustive record of the life and times of a unique and rare talent, from an intricate 'family tree' account of the lives of his ancestors to what at times seems like a day-by-day diary of his early days as a struggling house physician at Kingston Hospital and years of penury as a young husband and father. Long sections detailing many of Pedler's scientific detours may lead to a certain glazing-over of the eyes and the author's text is occasionally a little breathless but it's impossible not to be dazzled and overwhelmed by a work which is quite clearly an absolute labour of love.

Kit Pedler, who never enjoyed the best of health, died suddenly (and peacefully) in May 1981 at the age of just 53 at a time when his TV career was finding its feet and he was within an ace of achieving what must surely have been one of his great ambitions – to become a respected and recognised popular scientist. *The Quest for Pedler* is an engrossing and challenging read but it's also inspirational, life-affirming and potentially even life-changing.

Paul Mount

RATING  9



WHO'S CHANGING - AN ADVENTURE IN TIME WITH FANS

DVD / Cert: E / Director: Cameron K. McEwan / Starring: Louise Jameson, Neve McIntosh, Sophie Aldred, Dan Starkey / Release Date: Out Now

Cameron K. McEwan, creator of the popular *Blogger* Who website, directs this charming and affectionate look at the history of both *Doctor Who* as a TV series and the way its fans have celebrated it across the decades. Early conventions in the 1970s in draughty London church halls have blossomed into massive (and usually massively profitable) high profile events where the fans mingle with the stars and

the fans, increasingly, indulge in their passion for 'cosplay' (wearing replica *Doctor Who* costumes) and now, it appears, 'crossplay', where the girls dress as the boys and the boys dress as the girls. Whatever next?

Cameron's documentary is, in many ways, a timely postscript to the loud and shouty celebration events and presentations of last year's fiftieth anniversary

season. Largely stripped of the world-bestriding bravura of much of the BBC's commemoration of fifty years of travel in Space and Time, *Who's Changing* just lets the fans – and some of the show's stars old and new – talk about why they love *Doctor Who* in a simple, straightforward and entirely naturalistic way. The documentary discreetly teases out its contributors' first memories of *Doctor Who*, recollections of convention experiences, the American influence, the increasing sexualization of the series (in which one girl dressed as laughable 1980s male companion Adric, not unsurprisingly, expresses her distaste for the sexualizing of TV characters) and, on potentially less incendiary ground, favourite episodes and those dark days (or 'stolen years') when the show was the BBC's shameful, quietly cancelled family black sheep.

Inevitably talks turn to dressing up. This reviewer has never seen the appeal of squeezing into a homemade replica of some gaudy costume which even the actor who wore it on TV couldn't quite carry off, but there's no denying the enthusiasm and sheer lack of self-consciousness shown by those happy to be interviewed wearing replica Patrick Troughton costumes or with their faces plastered in silver make-up. Good on 'em.

But it's not just the fans who share their passion for *Who*. Cameron has roped in some familiar faces from the TV series – classic years names such as Louise Jameson (Leela) and Sophie Aldred (Ace) rub shoulders with newer faces Neve McIntosh (Vestra) and Dan Starkey (Strax) and writers such as former script editor Gary Russell, scriptwriter James Moran and former *Buffy* scribe Jane Espenson. There are, as they say, many many more, but to reel out a list of names here would just spoil the fun and, of course, the surprise.

If you're a long time fan of *Doctor Who*, then *Who's Changing* won't tell you anything you don't already know. But then that's not the point. Cameron's film, unfussy and without artifice, is like watching some old friends talk enthusiastically and without inhibition about a shared passion. Sometimes you'll find yourself shouting at the screen, "How can you like that, it's rubbish!" and, sometimes you'll be nodding sagely in agreement as someone slightly spaced-out with silver hair admits to adoring *Genesis of the Daleks*. *Who's Changing* ultimately celebrates one thing about *Doctor Who* that never, ever changes – the fact that its most devoted fans adore it almost unconditionally. Perhaps that's exactly how it should be.

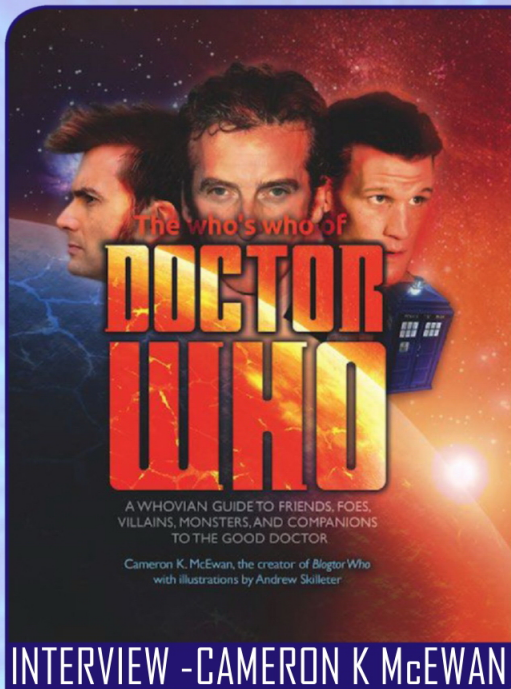
Extras: Extended interviews

Paul Mount

RATING ★★★★★ B

Go to bloggerwho.com for details of where to purchase or live-stream *Who's Changing*.

www.starburstmagazine.com



INTERVIEW - CAMERON K McEWAN

Doctor Who superfan Cameron K McEwan has been running the popular news/reviews/opinions website *Blogtor Who* since May 2008. Last year Cameron's first book, *The Who's Who of Doctor Who*, was published and his charming and affectionate *Doctor Who* documentary, *Who's Changing*, was recently released on DVD. *StARBURST Magazine* caught up with Cameron to find out more about the documentary and about his devotion to all things Time Lord...

StARBURST: How did the *Who's Changing* project come about and was it always the plan that you would direct the film?

Cameron McEwan: It came about over lunch with a producer friend of mine last year, who's also a massive *Doctor Who* fan. We'd just finished working on a web series together and started thinking about what

to do next. Being the anniversary year we thought that a documentary would be a good idea. I'd wanted to explore the changing face of *Who* fandom, particularly the seismic shift in recent years. It's fascinating to me. I grew up not really knowing any other *Who* fans at all. Compare that with now where everyone loves *Doctor Who* (well, almost). But it's the rise of the female fan which is

most interesting. In *Who*, the female voice has often been overshadowed (and, to a certain extent, still is) and this was a way of exploring that dynamic.

How did you select your subjects/victims for interview, i.e. both the fans and the professionals?

[Laughs] Initially, we drew up a "hit" list, based on events and conventions that were coming up. I'm in the lucky position of knowing a few people involved in *Who* (past and present) so we already had an "in" with some of the talent. Some, however, were opportunities that presented themselves on the day. James Moran is the perfect example of this. Bumped into him at a comic convention. Great interview too, lovely guy! But most of the big names were planned.

The fans were just people we met on the day. We interviewed a lot of fans and there wasn't enough room for everyone, sadly. So it was mainly down to availability and our ability to get to them. Once we broke our fundraising goal, we then went looking for some really big names, though this proved to be fruitless.

The film looks at the development of *Doctor Who* as a series and the way it has been appreciated over the years and is split into distinct 'sections'. Was this the plan for the film from the start or was it influenced by the material you gathered from your subjects? How much preparation was involved before you actually started filming?

Having studied documentaries during my degree, I wanted to take out any kind of voice guiding the film, or prejudice any arguments. We initially discussed having me present it but [with] the wealth of material and our fantastic interviewees, I was not needed. Something I was very happy about! We had some ideas before we started filming but these changed as the interviews came in. We knew some things had to be covered from the get-go (the start of fandom, for example). Dealing with "crossover" is something that wasn't thought about until it became an issue with our guests. It was new to me. Being slightly experienced in film-making, we were prepared for change. Always have a backup plan and be ready to roll with the punches. Thankfully our punches were touches of genius gifted to us by our subjects that made us think about fandom in other ways.

Over what period of time was the film made?

We started in February and finished September 2013 - I think. Though we chucked in some footage we'd shot from a convention in late 2012. Actually, there's also some footage from the Official Celebration. So there's stuff from November

in there too. We'd almost finished the edit by that point though.

How involved have you been in the practical side of the production of the film, i.e. financing, distribution, retailing, publicity etc?

I was involved across the board, to some extent. My brilliant producer Elisar Cabrera did a great job in selling the film to online stores and actual physical stores (they still exist) and also setting up the website (whoschanging.co.uk). I was on the front line with him, as it were. I took DVDs around stores in London and helped ship them all off to our lovely fundraisers. Like Elisar, I was involved in the design of the DVD, working with the fab artist Grant Perkins on the cover, back cover, etc.... All those things needed attention. So, I would say I was quite involved in every aspect. [Laughs]

Why should Doctor Who fans buy *Who's Changing*?

It's a genuinely interesting story, with a number of brilliant people, both fans and those directly involved in making *Doctor Who*, chatting about the show they love. There's a whole world of fandom that many people probably don't know anything about, and I hope that we go some way to demonstrating the remarkable guys and girls out there. Fans will also see just how actors and writers love and admire the fans. It's heart-warming.

How long have you been a fan of Doctor Who and what are your earliest memories? Which are your favourite stories and, of course, who's your favourite Doctor?

My earliest memory is the cliffhanger to *City of Death* part one, the reveal of

Scarothe. Utterly emblazoned on my mind. That season was very vivid for me for years and I spent years, so many years, tracking down *Nightmare of Eden*. That story horrified me as a child. Eventually got it, taped off UK Gold in the mid-'90s. Quite the revelation. [Laughs] I'm on "record" as saying what my favourite story is after doing my 50 favourite stories for *Blogtor Who*. It hasn't changed, it's *Turn Left*. Despite not having much 'The Doctor' action in it, his resonance and emotional footprint is felt throughout. Tears every time. And my favourite Doctor? Hmm, Peter Cushing. [Laughs]

You've also written a book, *The Who's Who of Doctor Who*. How did that come about and was the writing a process you enjoyed?

I have a few friends who are trying to get books published and they all asked me how I did it - how I went about pitching to the publisher and exactly what the process was. I annoyed every single one of them by telling them I received an email from the publisher asking me to write *The Who's Who of Doctor Who*. It was that simple. The hard bit, of course, was actually writing it. [Laughs]

Regarding the show generally; do you think the BBC did the show justice in its fiftieth anniversary?

I think BBC Worldwide did a super job in celebrating *Doctor Who* in 2013. From those beautiful stamps to those unforgettable three days in November at the Official Celebration, the team involved were impeccable and truly gave fans another avenue to celebrate fifty years outside the television adventures. I would certainly say that BBC Worldwide unquestionably did *Doctor Who* justice in its fiftieth anniversary.

The Blogtor Who site remains hugely popular and informative. What motivated you to start the site in the first place and how do you see it progressing/developing?

Well, thanks for saying. I was running another site, which was just a blog about TV and anything else I felt like chatting about, when it became apparent that I was writing about *Doctor Who* quite a lot. And I thought that maybe for the visitors not interested in *Who*, then my site was becoming a tad annoying. So it was really an offshoot of that (which I stopped updating years ago). As for the future, who knows? Like everything in my life, I don't have a plan or development ideas. It is what it is.

Are you planning to direct any further projects?

At the moment we're planning on getting the film out to various festivals and the like, trying to spread the word. I'm now writing another *Doctor Who* book so my time will be focused on that. I'd love to direct again though. I love meeting people with a story to tell.

How do you think the 21st century version of the series compares with the 'classic' series and what do you think of the show at the moment?

Good question. When *Who* came back in 2005 I couldn't have been happier. I loved it so much, much more than I did when I was a boy. And I should say, I was known for years as being THE *Doctor Who* fan. Supporting it through the "wilderness" years when being a fan was looked upon in the most sniffiest of fashions. There was an emotional core to the show on its return which, for me, wasn't present before. That was the gift of Russell T Davies to *Doctor Who*. Chris and Billie were so good together and, to be honest, I couldn't have imagined just how good it was still going to get. Series Four is when I loved *Doctor Who* the most. *Midnight*, *Turn Left* then *The Stolen Earth* - my favourite run of episodes. My fondest memories of the show and my own excitement.

At the moment, *Doctor Who* is still a very popular television show. I'm constantly amazed at how adored it is around the world. Makes me feel very happy.

What are your own personal long-term ambitions?

Crikey. There's a question. I've no professional goals when it comes to writing, acting or anything like that. Probably where I'm going wrong. [Laughs] I'd really like to be happy. Just happy. That's all.

Paul Mount

THE WHO'S WHO OF DOCTOR WHO and WHO'S CHANGING are both available now. Check out blogtorwho.com for further details.

www.starburstmagazine.com





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Oh we do like to geek beside the seaside!

Caroline Preece

The Girl From

PLANET



Quite understandably, in the month or so since Spike Jonze's *Her* was released in cinemas, there has been much discussion about what its ideas might say about our society. Will we all start preferring emotional attachment with our computers over real human beings? Has it already happened? These are poignant questions rightly inspired by the film and, while we might never answer them until the planet has already reached the vivid future it gently depicts, discussing *Her* also throws this kind of genre cinema into the spotlight. Why does this, a film about a man falling for his disembodied operating system, feel more real to us than that time travel rom-com or werewolf fantasy, and shouldn't that be more of a concern?

Movies have never really been a place to find depictions of true and realistic romance, and we could argue that 2014 is a time when film fans are at least, with a little digging, more able than ever to find something half-decent to stream over a weekend that also manages to strike a chord in their hearts. Science-fiction and fantasy, in many cases, are useful tools for filmmakers to use in their exploration of our real world, with every good example having something to do with the human condition no matter how elaborate the setting. This is true for *Her*, which treats its futuristic environment as a very well constructed afterthought, used only to allow the ideas to exist without questions of realism and believability.

But the sentiments that lay within, along with the decision to release the film on Valentine's Day in the UK (though it reached



US audiences over a month earlier), suggest that this is a film to enjoy on a romantic level as well as a speculative science-fiction one, and is as geared towards fans of romantic dramas as it is to indie film fans and hard-core sci-fi nuts. It is, of course, entirely possible to fit into all three of those boxes at the same time (if it wasn't, this column wouldn't exist), but it's also a unique place for a film like *Her* to be in. It was always going to be a hard sell but, against the odds, critical acclaim and a level of curiosity have meant that it's been seen by people that would never have gone for the concept on paper.

Her is relatively unique, if not in emotional content then in its ideas, and appeals to our need to come to terms with the alarming changes we're seeing in the relationship between technology and humans. This is where the film really excels, and for which it will inevitably be remembered – the rendering of this future world is so like our own that it's entirely, frighteningly recognisable. This ability to comment on our own world with a comfortable distance is something that has always characterised science fiction and, since the real dawn of the genre on screen with *Metropolis*, cinematic sci-fi has always relished the chance to bring these ideas of a recognisable future to life.

But in 2014, that is a sharp contrast to the fantastical fairy tales we've been handed for the last few years and, at a time when pure escapism is understandably preferable to unflattering mirrors lifted up to our troubled world, that's an encouraging thing. Romance is something that genre cinema has sometimes struggled with, a gender imbalance and preference for action more often than not pushing sensitive souls more towards the romantic drama section of their video store (remember those?) and away from anything otherworldly. That's obviously a harsh generalisation, and one that's not always accurate, but it does call into question who exactly films like *Her* are geared towards, and who ultimately gets to see them.

Romantic sci-fi is a relatively smallish subgenre, and one that isn't known for spreading its wings too far outside of the status quo. That's almost certainly down partly to studio execs who don't know who the audience for grownup, serious, romantic sci-fi would be, and that just makes the films that make it into cinemas that much more intriguing. Notable recent examples include *Monsters*, which featured a blossoming romance against the backdrop of an alien invasion, *Another Earth*, *Source Code*, *Upside Down* and *Perfect Sense*, all of which prioritise their romantic or human



THIS MONTH

HER – A TIMELESSLY FUTURISTIC ROMANCE FOR SCI-FI FANS

elements over the futuristic or fantastic worlds in which they're set. These movies do exist, but they're rarely talked about and almost never financially successful.

Her is most similar in spirit to movies like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Ruby Sparks*, which both attempt to uncover the ways in which relationships work in the modern world, through genre concepts chosen for their poignancy and thematic relevance to real life matters. The former uses the concept of memory-erasers for hire but ultimately shows us that love affairs, no matter how sour they turn and how devastatingly they crumble, are inevitable and completely necessary. *Ruby Sparks*, on the other hand, has a lot of the same ideas about romanticised, dehumanised love as *Her*, with a writer bringing his perfect woman to life. These films have something to say about the way we fall in love, and use sci-fi and fantasy to do it.

They use their genre concepts to tell old, timeless stories in completely new and unique ways, and in the process show up the vast majority of romantic fantasy and supernatural rom-coms for the shallow, cynical produce that they are. Much of the hard sci-fi we treasure has genuinely lovable romantic relationships hidden within, but romantic cinema all too often forgets to pay attention to its genre elements. How many sci-fi and fantasy geeks have 13 *Going on 30* or *The Host* on their shelves? *Her* is different and, because

of the care and attention it has for everything it's trying to do – not just half of itself – it is a better and more satisfying film.

It feels like a slight contradiction to claim that a film in which a man falls in love with his artificially intelligent operating system is actually more in tune with the real world than something like Richard Curtis' recent time travel rom-com, *About Time*, but that seems to be the case. I believe that both have their time and their place, and actually enjoyed the whimsical idealism of the latter, but the way in which Spike Jonze uses the conventions of these two apparently opposing genres seems to tap into their potential like nothing else in a while. Two years ago, I wrote a column about the apparent incompatibility of romance and sci-fi, and it feels strange now to be returning to the topic with such an interesting example to the contrary.

As readers of Starburst, we're always going to gravitate more towards anything with a genre edge, but *Her* seems to have done the near-impossible by creating a piece of speculative sci-fi that can also be enjoyed purely for its depiction of a thoroughly modern romance. Our world might be becoming more and more reliant and emotionally attached to our computers and phones, but it's also becoming more tolerant and understanding of different sources of love and romance among ordinary, existing human beings. The film operates as much



as a metaphor for different, formerly taboo relationships as it does as an allegory for our growing dependence on technology.

Viewed in a certain way, and highlighted by Rooney Mara's character in the film itself, *Her* is a thoroughly depressing look at our own inevitable descent into narcissistic selfishness and the way in which that shift might ruin our ability to connect with other, real and complicated human beings, romanticising nothing and yet everything at the same time. This is in complete opposition to the endless stream of vapid YA adaptations and modernised fairy tales that have been served to us over the last few years, and films like *Eternal Sunshine* and *Her* are pleasingly uncomfortable in their unflinching honesty about the growing majority of our experiences.

Her doesn't fall into the trap of showing how technology and our relationship with it will ultimately lead to our destruction – it isn't really even an openly dystopic vision of the future – it simply takes something relevant and concerning in our own world and uses it to create an entirely believable future world that, in a few years, might look positively old fashioned. *Her* is simultaneously modern and timeless and, after lots of evidence to the contrary, finally shows off the ways in which science fiction can actually make a film more pertinent and significant, rather than less. It is, in short, what science fiction was always meant for, and has every right to be remembered for this perception and sincerity about the world in which we live.

+



BLADES OF GLORY

BY ANDREW TILDESLEY



With AIRWOLF finally getting the Blu-ray treatment this month, it's high time STARBURST paid tribute to the legacy of a TV cult classic...

FROM the heavy electronic bassline that told you it was lurking below the horizon, to the synthesised brass that fanfared at its appearance, to the scream of the supersonic jets that hurtled the titular helicopter past the camera, *Airwolf* sounded unbelievably cool. Not only that but considering the sleek, aerodynamic helicopter with rocket racks and machineguns that popped out of its ergonomic body work, the pilots' helmets with their hi-tech drop down visors and the shots of aerial stunts and explosions over significant American geographical features (often standing in for places far further afield than Utah and California) *Airwolf* looked unbelievably cool too.

So that's established, right? Right. *Airwolf* was cool.

And it was far more than just a *Knight Rider* or *Blue Thunder* rip-off (and let's not even mention the crime fighting super-vehicle shows that followed - *Street Hawk*? Yuck), although admittedly the prominence of *Knight Rider* (created by walking success story Glen A. Larson - the man behind *The Fall Guy*, *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* and *Quincy*) often eclipses *Airwolf* and gives it the appearance of a 'me too' franchise. *Airwolf* was

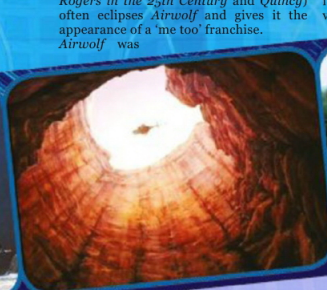
the brainchild of Donald Bellisario (the man who would subsequently create the generation-defining *Quantum Leap*) who had a much more dark and moody series in mind, reflective of Cold War post-Vietnam sentiments towards world affairs. Bellisario had in fact worked both in partnership with and under rival producer Larson, the two being the men behind the man with the moustache that was *Magnum, P.I.* (as co-writers and producers) and Bellisario writing for Larson's creation (and Mormon theology vehicle) *Battlestar Galactica*.

Unlike the flashy Trans Am of *Knight Rider*, *Airwolf* was a serious military vehicle, with serious technical jargon and lit-up buttons with serious words written on them, serious weapons (including chain guns and nuclear-tipped shrike missiles) and dynamic digital displays with diagrams of almost every imaginable enemy vehicle - although the fact that *Airwolf* could fly faster than sound (due to its ability to "something something disengage rotor, something something twin jets") was maybe a little bit silly. *Airwolf* didn't have a moving LED on its hood, nor did it patronise its pilots in a camp digital voice. As

much as co-pilot Santini dubbed it 'The Lady', it was a machine and it did what it was told.

And Stringfellow Hawke, *Airwolf*'s pilot and leading man, was no Michael Knight. While the latter, for all his troubled past, came across as something of a happy-go-lucky lady's man, Stringfellow was a wounded and thoughtful Vietnam vet, certain that everyone he ever loved would die or be stolen from him (his parents died when he was 12, his brother St John went missing in 'Nam) and driven by a sense of injustice and distrust of authority, including of the government who he was sure were hiding something about the disappearance of his MIA brother.

For sensitive 7 year olds like this writer, who had no intention of having anything to do with girls in case they caught fleas, Stringfellow Hawke was the hero we needed. He lived as a hermit in a rustic log cabin full of priceless artworks and vintage wines with only his dog for company and serenaded the local eagle population with his cello. Let me just say this again. He played a cello. Now



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

JAN MICHAEL VINCENT
(STRINGFELLOW HAWKE)



Vincent's career, although it started glitteringly with co-starring roles with Charles Bronson, John Wayne and Robert Mitchum, has been chequered with TV movies and low budget straight-to-video releases and, rumour has it, by his long-term alcoholism. He has even admitted to the possible effects of his drinking and newfound cocaine addiction on production delays and costs to *Airwolf*.

Vincent was first discovered by James Dean's agent and had early roles in Disney's *The World's Greatest Athlete* and the *Danger Island* serial on *The Bama Splits*.

In the years since *Airwolf* he has been repeatedly ordered (and chosen to go) into rehab, been arrested for public drunkenness and bail infringements, stopped by the police for drunk driving, sleeping in the streets and publicly brawling and these days speaks (possibly permanently) with a raspy voice after a DUI car accident in which he also broke his neck and detached his retina. He had an earlier car crash, during the filming of *Red Line* (1996) where he went through the windshield, and appeared in the film with serious facial scars, stitches and even his hospital ID bracelet still visible.

He has spoken of a willingness to act again but the parts don't seem to be coming.

there's a real man for you. Not only that but he eschewed red meat, caught and cooked his own fish suppers and refused to wear underpants. No, really.

His co-pilot, Dominic Santini, was also his employer in his day job for a stunt flying company, Santini Air, as well as his oldest friend and confidante (having raised Hawke after the death of his parents). Played by the permanently loveable Ernest Borgnine, Santini offered the comic relief, as well as worldly wisdom, often waxing lyrical on his WWII days knocking around with Hawke's father.

The Devon of Airwolf's outfit was Archangel, a senior representative of The Firm (a sort of cartoony version of the CIA). Archangel had a cowboy moustache and drawl but the white suit, Panama hat and swaggering sophistication of an Ernest Hemingway character. The character's ridiculously posh real name, Michael Codemsmith Briggs III, may explain why a codename was needed.

Airwolf's creator (in the plotline) was evil genius and sexual sadist Dr Charles Henry Moffet, played by David Hemmings, a man best known (to me) as Dildano, the revolutionary who had sex via pill and hand contact with Jane Fonda in *Barbarella* but to the more cultured of you he may be better known as the lead in *Blow Up* (interestingly Hemmings also directed several episodes of *Airwolf*, as well as episodes of *The A-Team*, *Magnum P.I.* and *Quantum Leap*).

Moffet (a pilot as well as evil genius) unexpectedly took command of Airwolf at its test flight (located in front of Vasquez Rocks, the distinctive rock formation where Captain Kirk slew the Gorn and Bill and Ted were thrown to their deaths by the evil robot Bill and Ted) before machine-gunning and nuclear-tipped rocketing the testing facility into oblivion, leaving test-manager Archangel (ever after in possession of an eyepatch and limp) apparently the sole survivor.

Ex-pilot for the Firm, Stringfellow Hawke, was then bullied out of retirement and off to Libya (where else would a hijacked helicopter have been taken in the '80s?) to steal Airwolf back. Successfully, obviously, *Airwolf* then threw us our first curveball as Hawke steals and hides the helicopter as a bargaining chip to get the government to find his brother. This showed a nicely anti-authoritarian streak in *Airwolf*'s writing that never went away. In the uneasy stand-off Hawke agreed to undertake missions for The Firm and they agreed to do what they could to find St John.

Early missions for The Firm included smuggling defectors out of the Soviet Union, protecting an African President and aiding Cuba exiles (as well as personal tribulations for Stringfellow and Santini and the ongoing quest to find the MIA St John Hawke).

As much as The Firm promised to protect Hawke from the other government agencies (both domestic and foreign) which were after Airwolf, they still weren't straight-up good guys (in spite of their white-suited dress code), they had their own agenda, even

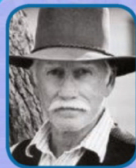
supporting drug lords, dictators, rebels and plot antagonists (although they had nothing to do with '80s number one *Star Trekkin'*, so they weren't all bad).

And, considering the series' often tub-thumping '80s Cold War patriotism, The Firm never lost that antagonist edge, even during the final Barry Van Dyke season, often seeking excuses, or even creating underhanded ruses, to seize Airwolf from Hawke and Santini while their backs were turned. Not only that, but they even employed their own ruthless assassination team to eliminate any operatives they considered 'compromised' - the so-called Zebra Squad (no, we no idea why they called it that either) from whose attentions even our heroes weren't exempt.

From Season Two plotlines took on a more domestically minded, less Cold War agenda and, to balance the testosterone heavy cockpit environment, a female character, Caitlin O'Shannessy (played by Jean Bruce Scott), was brought into the team. This trend towards domestic plotlines (which perhaps didn't stretch budgets quite as much as foreign location sets did) continued in the following two seasons.

Although the fan favourites tend to cluster in Season One there is still a good share of decent episodes in Seasons Two and Three, including *Moffet's Ghost* (note the extra 'T' added by sloppy production editors - you'd never see such things at Startburst) in Season Two and Season Three's *Airwolf II*, which featured a nailbiting dogfight between the Lady and an identical helicopter made

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



ALEX CORD
(ARCHANGEL)

Alex Cord rode horses from the age of 2, becoming a rodeo rider at 16 (barely slowed by developing and recovering from polio in the interim) he eventually decided to go to college after an 8-month hospital stay caused by rodeo injuries. It was while studying Literature that he discovered acting (allegedly as a result of *cherchez la femme*) and subsequently joined touring Shakespearian companies and even acting in the theatre in London.

His first TV role was in an episode of *Laramie*, and his career has seen more than its fair share of Westerns, alongside detective shows. He was also the lead character in Gene Rodenberry's short-lived, post-apocalyptic *Genesis II* series.

Cord now raises horses in North Texas, also appearing at Western Film Festivals and has been awarded a Golden Boot for services to Westerns. He is also an author, writing novels both under his born name (Viespi) as well as Cord.



ERNEST BORGNINE
(DOMINIC SANTINI)

Born Ernes Effron Borgino to Italian American parents, Ernest Borgnine was already an established Hollywood and TV legend by the time he settled into the co-pilot's seat of *The Lady*. Winning the best actor Oscar in 1955 for *Marty*, Borgnine had begun his career as a character actor, often playing villains in films such as *From Here to Eternity* and *Bad Day at Black Rock*. In the decades leading to *Airwolf* he had gone on to have consistent, rather than stellar, success. With roles in films from Disney's *The Black Hole* to Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*, Borgnine was a face that had been around a long time.

After *Airwolf*, Borgnine continued acting, pretty much right up to the end of his 95 years on Earth, including a late role as the original voice of Mermaid Man in *Spongebob Squarepants*.

He passed away in July 2012.

from the same design and dubbed Redwolf (because it had a red bit on it), piloted by an insane rival, still loyal to the late Dr Moffet.

However, by the fourth season budgets were dropped to a bare minimum and the cast (and some aspects of the plot) drastically changed. In the season establishing episode, St John Hawke (played by Barry Van Dyke - who resembled the previous photos we had seen of St John in no way whatsoever) is finally discovered alive (and in fairly good fettle), shortly before an explosion kills Dominic Santini (unforgivable) and critically (fatally?) wounds Stringfellow. Without any of the motivation (or previous extensive piloting experience) of Stringfellow, St John takes up the distinctive black joystick, under the instructions of a renamed Firm, and Airwolf flies again.

To many fans, it felt like our favourite series had been the victim of a Stalinist purge. New faces had been hastily doctored onto photos of old, familiar bodies in old, familiar scenes - The Firm became The Company, replacing Archangel without notice with the uncodenamed Jason Locke (guess it was just a posh name thing) a Santini returned to the cockpit (Dom's niece) alongside the Hawke (St John), everything had at least a passing similarity to what had gone before (although poor Caitlin was never mentioned again). The theme tune was the same, the titles were the same, the helicopter was the same, 'don't worry' the show seemed to insist, 'nothing is wrong, nothing is different'. But things were different and things really weren't right.

Even to an untrained eye, the show was clearly in trouble, the whole look and feel of

it much cheaper. In Season 4 all the aerial footage was culled from the previous three series, Dick Van Dyke made an appearance (as an insane doctor intent on quarantining the World's sick and poisoning the Pacific if Airwolf tries to stop him) and, worse still, that most All-American of shows was even being produced in Canada to save on costs. It couldn't last. And it didn't. The Van Dyke era lasted just a single season, and so ended *Airwolf*.

However, for all its short run, the show still has a legacy. Not just that its global syndication has allowed for decades of repeats from Indonesia to Germany, to Poland to South Africa, creating a worldwide fan-base from decades of repeats. No, it's all about that theme tune.

Mark Cairns was an early fan-club member (taking leadership of the International Appreciation Association, dubbed *The Wolf Pack*, and editing their fanzine *File A56-7W*, until giving up the role in 1995) and had long been inspired by the synth heavy score that marked *Airwolf* out as a series. He had also spent years hunting in vain for a copy of the *Airwolf* soundtrack. He started working on his own renditions, then recording them, perfecting and finally sharing them with other club members, including a professional soundtrack producer, Gerry R Forrester, who had recently released the original score for the BBC's *The Tripods* and jumped at the chance at working on an *Airwolf* soundtrack project. This became the *Airwolf Themes* double CD, a loving recreation of incidental music, as closely as could be managed with synthesisers and production equipment available at

the time, even including pieces recreated by Sylvester Levay, the composer behind all the early *Airwolf* music (who had been located producing musicals in Germany), with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. The limited edition CD, released in 1999 and shipped to 42 different countries, holds an unofficial world record for the most expensive TV soundtrack album sold at auction and original printing CDs still fetch hundreds on eBay. The follow-up CD *Airwolf Extended Themes*, created by Mark with co-producer Jan Michal Bzulew, is released this month.

Mark also encouraged fellow fan and film student Martin Grant to work on an *Airwolf* documentary. Five weeks filming in the US has secured participation and support from key players on the series, from stars, such as Alex Cord (Archangel) and guest star Lance LeGault (familiar also as Decker from *The A-Team*), to producers, writers and stuntmen, to create the kind of documentary that Universal couldn't be bothered to make about their own show. The project is fan funded and keen for more support to help with the post-production costs to bring it to the public (it only narrowly missed inclusion on the latest Blu-ray).

Nearly thirty years on, *Airwolf* still looks cool, sounds cool, and, I think we're all in agreement, is cool. Right? Right.



AIRWOLF EXTENDED THEMES is released in late March, with **AIRWOLF: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION** hitting Blu-ray on April 14th.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

AIRWOLF



Airwolf itself was a Bell 222 civilian helicopter, with the gadgets and weaponry that made it the combat helicopter we knew and loved created by strapping moulds onto it. The Lady was sold out of film and TV and retired to Germany where it was rather fittingly put into service as an air ambulance - an apparently happy ending. That is, until it crashed during a thunderstorm in the early nineties, killing all three occupants (but not, thankfully, the patient who it had successfully rushed to hospital).

PRESSING THE FLESH

by Paul Mount



There are new arrivals in the village of Roarton as writer Dominic Mitchell's gritty 'zombie' drama *IN THE FLESH* returns to BBC3 for a second, six-part series following a well-received first three episode run last year. Partially Deceased Syndrome sufferer Kieren Walker (Luke Newberry) is still trying to find his place following his resurrection, but his world - and the whole village - is about to be turned upside down. Kieren's old 'hunting partner' Amy (Emily Bevan) is back and she's brought a new friend - the mysterious and deeply charismatic Simon (Emmett J Scanlon) who has come to Roarton on a very specific mission. Meanwhile single-minded politician Maxine Martin (Wunmi Mosaku) comes to the village bringing some radical new ideas regarding the treatment of PDS sufferers. Last October, just a few weeks into the production of the new series, *STARBURST* ventured out on a grey, drizzly day and travelled to Astley Hall in Chorley, near Manchester, to meet cast and crew old and new to find out a little of what's in store in this new series of *IN THE FLESH*...

LUKE NEWBERRY

24 year-old Luke plays *IN THE FLESH*'s central character, PDS sufferer Kieren Walker. His resurrection after committing suicide and the story of his return to his home village of Roarton formed the backbone of the first series...

Starburst: Where do we find Kieren at the beginning of the second series?

Luke Newberry: We're nine months on and Kieren is getting itchy feet in Roarton; he wants to travel the world and go somewhere where PDS sufferers are better tolerated and better looked-after. He wants to go somewhere where people know what he's all about and how to handle the situation better. At first he wants to go to Australia and then he decides on Berlin. He's an artist so then he decides to go to Paris to be amongst artistic souls - a sort of reverse bucket list as he's already dead! This time the series is more about Kieren facing different obstacles rather than the first series which had just one massive obstacle: finding acceptance and coming back. This series sees him trying to just get on with life as lots of different things and people come in and get in the way. The second series definitely expands Kieren and allows me to show different sides to him.

Is Roarton less openly hostile towards PDS sufferers this year?

It's definitely moved on but it's still not enough for Kieren. It's not somewhere he can thrive and there are changes coming to Roarton as well, which at first seem to make things better but actually make things worse. He then feels trapped and that he can't get out.

How has Kieren's relationship with his family changed - especially with his sister who was violently opposed to his return in the first series?

His relationship has developed and he's closer to his sister again; they were doing all right at the end of season one and now they're really close again, like they were before I died, which is great. I'm 22 in terms of the time I've been alive, in the series I'm stuck at 18. PDS sufferers don't change, they're absolutely stuck as they were which is strange because Kieren has to deal with this prospect of a very long future so what do you do if you knew you're going to live a long time and with a lifetime of medication. He's really trying to shake it up a bit. He's not having nightmares now, the medication has evolved and things are improving and getting better.

Does Kieren find 'closure' this year following the death of Rik in the first series?

I think Rik's death stills haunt him. We get some scenes where Kieren goes to visit his grave and he likes to talk to him which helps him clear his head and get stuff out. But I think because he's had to deal with grieving for Rik as well as dealing with the fact that he's not going to come back this time, he has to slowly learn to move on.

Has Kieren's 'look' - the pallid complexion, slightly dead eyes - changed for this second series or are you still plastered in make-up and wearing uncomfortable lenses?

Kieren still wears a lot of make-up and I wear lenses a lot of the time. They were kind of weird at first because I don't wear contact lenses so it was a bit of a shock to my eyes but now they're really comfortable because I think we've got better lenses this series!

There's a new face in Roarton this year and the charismatic Simon (Emmet J Scanlon) is set to shake things up a bit. How does Kieren react to Simon?

He's cynical about Simon and very suspicious of him. When I discover he's with the Undead Liberation Army alarm bells start ringing. Kieren is really thrown by him and doesn't trust him. Simon is very different from everyone else in Roarton and he's also male and for Kieren to meet someone who's dangerous but also intelligent and profound makes Kieren think they should get on but he just doesn't trust him.

As an actor how do you 'get into' the role of a character like Kieren?

The quality of the writing made it easy to play because I just 'got it'. I understood the character but there were so many different things to think about that you

wouldn't have to think about with normal characters and things that you can't actually draw upon - I've never been dead and come back to life, for example!

What was your reaction when you were told the series had been recommissioned by the BBC?

Obviously we were all kind of hoping it would come back but nobody really knew for a while after the first series so I was really thrilled when I heard the news. I talked to Dom (*Dominic Mitchell, writer*) and he's very open to how I feel about the character but I trust Dom so much that I don't want to tinker with it - I just let him write Kieren. I wanted to see him have a bit of a better time and also not too good of a time - I don't think he should! But the tone is slightly lighter this year; because we've got six episodes to play with we can go down a few different routes. The humour's quite black!

Are you happy to stick with *In the Flesh* should it continue beyond its second year and do you have any dream roles or projects?

I love playing Kieren and I think there's talk about the show going on and it'd be brilliant if it did! Who knows! Beyond *In the Flesh* I just love challenging new writing, new things, new concepts. I'd love to do independent cinema, that's what I go and see and anything that's maybe slightly controversial and challenges your opinions on things!

So we're not likely to see you starring in *Transformers 5*?

Maybe not! Well, I am in *Hercules: The Legend Begins* and I did *Frankenstein's Army* a couple of years ago! But really I love all kinds and different types of cinema and TV.



EMILY BEVAN

After fleeing Roarton to find a new life at the end of series one, Amy Dyer, Kieren's 'hunting partner' in their undead state, returns in series two having apparently found the salvation and enlightenment she has been craving. But she's not alone...

What's going on with Amy as she returns to Roarton in season two?

Emily Bevan: Amy is a PDS sufferer who had died from leukemia. She suffered a lot towards the end of her life and is really embracing this second life and this freedom and this new chance. I think in the same way she was in the first series she's very upbeat; she's a little bit lonely so she latches onto people very quickly but in this new series she's a little bit more serious - the light and shade of Amy is going to come to the fore - and she's got some new ideologies which she's very passionate about. She's still upbeat Amy but she's come back a bit more knowing and clued-up about various things.

What brings her back to the village?

She's come back because she's found a new sense of purpose among the ULA - the Undead Liberation Army. She's always searching for something, trying to belong. She doesn't have a family so she left Roarton wanting to find some sort of family or community and she's found that community and she's now got a sense of purpose and a role and she's met Simon who is a huge influence on her. She's come back to Roarton because they're on a kind of mission. Simon is incredibly charismatic, a disciple of the ULA but he has his own disciples. He's a very powerful figure with his own energy and she's absolutely devoted to him and the cause. We know of Amy in the past that she latches onto people very powerfully; like with Kieren when they met in the graveyard and then became hunting partners together. But she didn't let go of Kieren, she went on to become his best



friend in the world! Because Amy doesn't have anything she needs to have a sense of purpose, she needs to know why she's back and she needs to have a place in some kind of community so she's wholeheartedly behind Simon. There was that lovely quote in series one which say that 'most people live their lives with one eye on the clock, we don't have to' and I guess it could either make you panic, thinking you've got this massive long life or it could give you a sort of *groundedness*, a sense of freedom. You've got no sell-by date! It's not just that you're back, you're going to change things, have a purpose.

Has Amy's relationship with Kieren changed due to her absence?

Amy left Roarton under a bit of a grey cloud. She wanted so much to be *au naturel* and to go around being herself and being herself caused her trouble; she was attacked by Gary in her own home and she had that bad experience in the Legion [*in series one*] where everyone was staring at her and so she's gone away and come back with renewed determination to be herself. It's interesting because Simon and Kieren are the two most important men in her life and she's very excited about them meeting each other. For Amy this is an exciting moment because she's told Simon all about Kieren.

One of the show's great themes, of course, is prejudice. The PDS sufferers aren't monsters, they're still human and yet it's possible to understand the suspicion of those who have to live with them. Is that a balance which interests you as an actor?

I think it's really cool that there is this balance because, as you say, these aren't monsters,

they're people, but in our rabid state we did kill people so I think you can understand why there are these two opposing forces in this series and you can identify with either really. We do get mistreated really badly; people sneer at them and have terrible prejudices against them but on the other side you've got the political party led by Maxine Martin who's representing all those people whose families were killed by rabid zombies, so you can really identify with both sides. The HVP [*Human Volunteer Force*] has been disbanded so it's not a violent local military force, it's a political front which makes it more dangerous, a bit like the BNP. It's more legitimate.

Did you get a chance to talk to Dominic about how you'd like to see Amy develop in series two or even whether she survives to the end of the series?

The lovely thing about *In the Flesh* is that it's a bit like a big family and we're so lucky to have had such a wonderful time on the first series with Luke and Harriet (Cains) and everyone else. It's such a warm and wonderful team and it's the same this series. Dom is very passionate about the show; we've become very close to him and inevitably we do talk about it but when I first read the script this character just jumped out of the page at me. I'd never met Dom before I read the first scripts and he knows Amy inside out so I don't want to influence him too much or sully any of his thoughts because he's a genius and I just want to let him do his stuff. Of course I have ideas and I have had conversations because she's a big part of my life now so I have ideas. But characters live or die in the series for the right reasons.



EMMETT J SCANLAN

Former *HOLLYOAKS* 'bad boy' Emmett J Scanlan [he played Brendan Brady in the C4 soap between 2010 and 2013 and will shortly be seen in Marvel's *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY*] is a newcomer to the *IN THE FLESH* cast for series two. He plays the mysterious, brooding Simon who, we discover, is an 'undead' man with a mission...

Who is Simon and what's he doing in Roarton?

Emmett J Scanlan: Simon is one of the 'Disciples of the Undead Prophet'. He's got a dark, chequered past; in his first life he searched for some sort of meaning and he could never find it and used destructive forces to dull the pain - we've all been guilty of doing that at some stage. He passed away by overdosing on heroin and in his 'risen' state finds purpose in his life with the Undead Prophet. He has a second chance and he's on a mission to find the first ever 'risen' which leads him to Roarton and to Kieren. Simon has risen from the dead in an untreated, rabid state. He was experimented on quite extensively so his body is littered with scars. Even at the beginning of his second life he's been victim to the living; he didn't relate to the living when he was alive and he's been a victim to them in his second life. That's when he meets the Undead Prophet and that's what gives him the direction he lacked in his previous life.

Would you say that Simon is a force for good or that he sees himself as a force for good?

What he's doing he believes is for the right cause but they might not necessarily be the right causes for the other characters in the show. But he believes he's doing the right thing and he's doing it for the greater good. It's a fascinating drama because you have the undead and you have the living and there's a racism towards them as well which generates a lot of sympathy for the PDS sufferers.





The series reminds me a bit of *District 9* with its different social layers.

How do Simon and Kieren relate to one another?

Kieren is not immediately taken in by Simon but Simon does have a way with him, it's like he's seducing characters with the way he speaks, quoting things left, right and centre. Simon didn't have any fear when he was alive and now he's got a purpose in life and no fear so it makes him a different animal altogether. He's very confident. There are a couple of flashes of violence in the first two episodes where Simon takes the law into his own hands and attacks a guy called Gary to protect Kieren. He gets a gun pointed at him but still doesn't blink, he just stares at the gun and in his own time just releases Gary and pushes him away.

Did you watch the first series when it went out?

Honestly I'd never even heard of it until they called and asked me if I was interested in coming in to read for Simon. I've been very picky about the stuff I've done since leaving *Hollyoaks*; I've done a couple of really nice smaller projects and said 'no' to quite a lot of stuff and then my agent rang me about this and I found what she was saying interesting as she was a fan. I downloaded it on iTunes and watched it in one sitting and when it was over I just remember staring into space for a bit because it was such a really strong unit of work that if I felt I needed to be part of so suddenly I was 'give me the fucking part, I'll fight for this if I need be'. It was a no-brainer - no pun intended - because it's the kind of thing where you see something like this on BBC3 - which is a brilliant channel for new material - and BBC America and I just had this strong feeling that it was going to do really well. But regardless of that, just to be part of something I believe to be good regardless of whether anyone else likes it or not just stimulates me and feeds my hunger. I've put a lot of people onto the show since then, I don't give them a choice - I make them watch it!

WUNMI MOSAKU

27 year-old Nigerian-born actress Wunmi Mosaku is another new face to *IN THE FLESH*. Wunmi, who previously appeared in acclaimed dramas *MOSES JONES* and *DANCING ON THE EDGE*, plays MP Maxine Martin, Roarton's elected representative from the radical Victus party. Maxine's party has very defined views about the place of PDS suffers in the new society...

How would you describe Maxine?

Wunmi Mosaku: Maxine is an MP, she's tough and she has a hidden agenda! She's with the Victus party and they've been voted into power in Roarton which is possibly more accepting of PDS sufferers than the rest of the district. But she's representing everyone in Roarton. She has to be diplomatic because the PDS sufferers exist, they have certain rights but parameters need to be set. She was born in Roarton but she left when she was quite young so she has no real history with any of the established characters so far.

So what are Maxine's political views in relation to the PDS sufferers?

She believes that the PDS sufferers should pay back their debt to society and that you don't have to be too nice to them! They've come back into our world; they haven't suffered but we've suffered because of them. Maxine's view is that they are not people, they are one missed dose away

from being rabid animals and she thinks 'well, yes, they're human and yes, I can be polite to them and they seem human' but let's not forget that if someone forgets to take their medicine or someone decides not to take their medicine then they're going to become murderers, they're going to become wild.

Is Maxine a likeable character?

Well I like her - but then I think as an actor you have to like the characters you play! But I don't think in real life she'd be my mate. I think if I was living in Roarton and the dead had risen then she might be my mate but if circumstances were different I probably wouldn't be sitting and having my lunch with her. If you're on her side she'll talk openly and honestly with you but if you're not on her side she'll still tell you what she thinks but with typical diplomacy. She's pro-life and that's 100% the motto for Victus.

Are you a fan of the fantasy/horror genre?

Not really. I did a film called *Citadel* a couple of years ago which was a sort of psychological thriller and I could barely watch it! But I think because this series is told from a different point view, it's about how people are reintegrated into society, it's not really scary. I think of myself as quite a left wing socialist but if the walking dead were among us I'd probably have quite a right-wing view, like Maxine, because they did just eat people's brains! It's hard to draw a comparison with reality because it's so far from it!



KENNETH CRANHAM

Veteran actor Kenneth Cranham is back for series two in his role as Roarton's fervent, opinionated Vicar Oddie. But things have changed since series one...
[SPOILERS AHEAD]

SB: How do we find Vicar Oddie as series two begins?

Kenneth Cranham: He's now got a congregation of four; his power seems to have slipped away and he's hitting the bottle - not something I know anything about! I remember when we recorded the first three episodes I did lots of moody looks at Luke which weren't used in the finished episodes so I think they were leaving it open as to whether Oddie would become a central figure in this batch. But I think maybe they thought they'd done Oddie so they'd move the story somewhere else so two of the 'elderly' members of the cast are gone in

the first episode. Maybe it's part of BBC3's youth policy, a little euthanasia in the entertainment industry!

Have you enjoyed your experience working on *In The Flesh*?

Being in the first three got me lots of kudos amongst my 20 year-old daughter and her friends; I hit their market by being in this which is nice. I've only done three things which could be called 'horror'; one of them was a Japanese vampire film where I played Edgar Allan Poe who turned out to a vampire [Tale of a Vampire, 1992], *Hellraiser 2* and now this so it's a nice little collection. I think this has the potential to be around for a while. I found that the people I persuaded to watch the first series were very taken with it. I thought it was very atmospheric, I thought it had a sort of terrible claustrophobia to it and I thought it had faded Scandinavian feel about it. People have said it's like Ken Loach and I suppose it is a bit. I really feel they managed to create a believable world in those first three episodes.



DOMINIC MITCHELL

34-year old IN THE FLESH creator Dominic Mitchell returns to pen all episodes of the show's extended second season...

When we first spoke last year (#387) you mentioned that you'd written a 'series bible' which contained all the background details about your world and its characters. Did you work from that bible in writing the second series?

Dominic Mitchell: Definitely. The character of Simon was in that original 'bible' but we just couldn't introduce him in the first series and I'm glad we didn't. I'm glad we had those three episodes to delve into the Walker family and really get to know Kieren and Amy and what happened to Kieren and Rik. I always imagined when I was doing 'the bible' that

there'd be this backlash against PDS sufferers going back into the community and that there would be a political party - I think I had a different on-the-nose name for them, something very similar to UKIP although Victor isn't UKIP even though it is a one-issue party! I had all those ideas that we couldn't get to in three episodes but now we've got six so I used quite a lot of what was in 'the bible' for season 2.

Since we haven't had chance to speak to Harriet Cains herself, what can you tell us about Kieren's sister Jem this season?

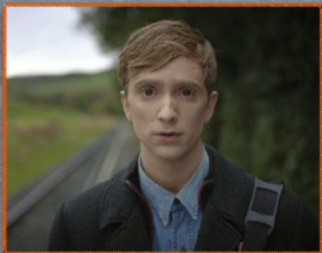
Jem is going back to high school to finish her GCSEs because she was pulled out when she was fourteen to fight the 'war', but it's difficult for her because she's now twenty and everyone else is sixteen. She's been fighting zombies in a war and the other kids are talking about boy bands so it's tough for her. She's suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and she's getting these flashbacks and she doesn't know what to do about them. Everyone's more or less forgotten about 'the Rising' and forgotten about what's happened. There's resentment in Roarton, everyone's getting on with things but underneath it all there are characters like Gary and Jem, ex-HVF [Human Volunteer Force] fighters who are now unemployed. They fought a war and now they're broke and no one's treating them like heroes any more. Gary's down the Job Centre and his only source of income is poaching rabbits in the woods for fifty quid a time. There's a lot of resentment underneath it all in Roarton.

Any particular favourite scenes, characters or storylines that our readers should look out for?

We have a zombie rave which Simon sets

up which is pretty damned cool! The very first scene in episode one, the teaser - I can't say much about it! - is an incredible opening sequence. The storyline which I think is really affecting involves Amy and medication, becoming immune to that medication which is really interesting for Amy to grapple with. We go back to the Treatment Centre in one of the episodes but in a different way - not too many spoilers! We've got these great secondary characters called Sandra and Clive who run a B&B; Clive's mother Connie is a PDS sufferer and Sandra can't stand Connie and it's very difficult - mother-in-laws and wives sometimes don't get along anyway but this mother-in-law is going to outlast Sandra! For us it was a chance to explore more of Roarton, to go into people's houses, the B&B, the GP surgery, the High School. It's a little bit lighter, it has a bit more light and shade but I wouldn't say it's become a comedy - we didn't want to change it too much - it's still very atmospheric and has the same tone.

IN THE FLESH returns to BBC3 on May 4th.



HORROR Obscura

This month, the machete wielding Martin Unsworth takes a trip to summer camp for some slasher-based fun, frolics and bloodshed...

SLAYING OUT FOR THE SUMMER





At the beginning of the eighties, a new breed of sub-genre blossomed in the shape of the slasher flick. A common location for several of these was a very American custom: the summer camp. Every year, American kids have the chance to get away from the city when school was out. This wasn't really something we British kids could relate to, as we simply made do with Laurel and Hardy shorts, Flash Gordon serial re-runs and *Why Don't You...?* on television. This tradition of sending the kids off for months of canoeing, camping, drug taking and sex never really translated to British sensibilities, especially since we don't often get the weather for it. Sure, we got school field trips and the occasional overseas jaunt, but not on the same scale. So it's a surprise that, when the premise was used as a location in films, we took the idea to our hearts. While they were meant to be a means of building spirit in the youngsters, the impression we were often left with was one of a sex-filled hotbed of bullies.

When *Friday the 13th* introduced us to Camp Crystal Lake and its assorted hormonal teens and ineffectual camp counsellors, it opened the floodgates for a slew of similarly set horror flicks. Of course, the famous *F13* bad-guy Jason Voorhees didn't actually appear in the first movie until (spoiler) the end, it didn't stop the idea of the camp slasher becoming a staple. The slasher film's origins could be traced back to the earliest giallo films such as Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* and *A Bay of Blood*; two films which set the template of elaborately staged kills by

a largely unseen, formidable foe. What the *F13* films did give us was the element of the deformed, unstoppable killing machine.

In a slew of copycat films, *The Burning* (1981) was among the most memorable. The film opens with a group of campers at Camp Blackfoot plotting to "scare the shit" out of camp caretaker Cropsy (Lou David). This grumpy, drunken bully had made their summer a misery so this prank should be enough payback for the youngsters. They set up a rotten, bug-filled, candle-lit skull (quite where they get the skull from isn't addressed), and go about waking him. It certainly does the job as when he sees the horrific sight, Cropsy freaks out, knocking over the skull and candle as well as the conveniently located gasoline cans. Engulfed in flames, he breaks from his cabin, screaming in agony, into the nearby lake and the kids flee - terrified. During his slow recovery in a New York hospital, he is treated as a freak; one particular orderly takes pleasure in bringing new recruits to see the horrendous sight. After five years of failed skin grafts and psychological therapy, he is sent back out into the wide world; the psychiatrist telling him "to try to avoid bearing a grudge to those kids". His first stop when out is, naturally, to visit a prostitute. However, when she catches sight of his mutilated face and gets scared, he loses his temper and twists a pair of fabric scissors into her stomach, before throwing her from the window. So it's reasonable to assume Cropsy's anger issues are far from sorted.

Meanwhile, at Camp Stonewater, just down the river from the original camp, a new group of teens has arrived for a summer of fun. Those in charge struggle to keep the kids under control; there's the usual bed-hopping and one particular camper, Alfred (Brian Backer), is creeping the others out by spying on the girls in the shower and is soon feeling like an outcast as a result. The 'grown ups', the camp counsellors, appear to be not much older than the kids and are fairly ineffectual. During one of the campfire evenings, counsellor Todd (Brian Matthews) recounts the story of what happened at the run-down Camp Blackfoot. It's the perfect tale to terrify the impressionable youths, and he is aided by one of the kids who wears a mask and jumps out at the opportune moment to scare the bejesus out of them. Unbeknown to the rest, Todd's story is being told first hand as he was one of the campers who caused Cropsy's accident. Alfred has also seen a face at the window of their dorm, but is not taken seriously. The early sequences at the camp are full of these false beats. During a baseball game, one of the girls goes into the trees to retrieve the ball. It's clear from the point of view shot that she is being watched, and a pair of garden shears comes into view. This girl's number is clearly up. Until she stoops and finds the ball, and the unseen predator abates.

The group plans to take a trip down the river to the idyllic-sounding Devil's Creek, which seems like a good idea, bringing them all together. However, Cropsy has followed them, and despite the fireside scare, when



the group head to bed, two of them decide to go skinny-dipping. Eddie (Ned Eisenberg) comes on too strong for Karen (Carolyn Houlahan), however, and she storms out of the water, leaving her alone. She thinks the others are playing another prank when she finds her clothes gone – scattered gradually into the forest. She finds more than her panties when she comes face to face with Cropsy. The following day, Eddie is quizzed on Karen's disappearance, but since the canoes are also missing the counsellors assume that she has gone back to camp; having already expressed her reservations about the pressure Eddie had been putting on her to have sex.

The group decides to make a raft in order for some of them to get help from the main camp. A mile or so down the river, they come across one of the canoes drifting. Excited, they paddle over, but Cropsy is lying in wait. In the film's most celebrated sequence, he slaughters them all. Thanks to Tom Savini's make-up effects, Cropsy's shears pierce throats, slash foreheads and snip fingers, sending them flying. Unaware, the rest of the group carries on camping. Glazer (Larry Joshua) and Sally (Carrick Glen) decide to have a little privacy in the night. Which is of course the worst thing anyone could do in this sort of situation. However, the 'rules' everyone now takes as read had not yet been planted; post-modern, self-conscious, 'meta' films were still many years away. Creepy Alfred sees the couple leave and having already been established as a voyeuristic pervert (it was Sally he had

been spying on in the shower), he naturally follows them to see more. He witnesses the pair being slaughtered; Glazer impaled on a tree with the shears. In one of the many inconsistencies in the film, it's never made clear how Cropsy made his way back to the camp, but then whenever do these films make sense? The others in the group don't believe Alfred, he's an oddball after all, and it's not helping his case that the bodies are gone when they try to find them.

After a meandering start, the film steps up a gear when Todd finds Glazer's body, but it's too late and he is clipped to the ground by Cropsy, who in true bad guy tradition appears out of nowhere. The group come across the drifting raft – containing the mutilated corpses of their friends – and hapless Alfred is chased into a ruined building in the middle of the forest where the fiery showdown takes place.

Although it's by no means a perfect film (its reputation is so much better than the execution), it is very enjoyable. As well as the now clichéd slasher trappings, there's an element of *Porkys*-type teen comedy – helped largely by the talented young cast. *The Burning* actually marked the début of several acclaimed actors: Jason Alexander plays the witty prankster role well, foregrounding his hit turn as George Costanza in TV's *Seinfeld*. Holly Hunter, who would become a big star thanks to *Raising Arizona* and her later Oscar winning role in *The Piano*, appears in a peripheral role. Fisher Stevens, the unfortunate kid who loses his

digits in the film's most famous sequence, is probably best remembered for his regrettable blackface performance in the *Short Circuit* films. While certainly not having the same level of career as the others, Brian Backer appeared in several eighties films, notably *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.

The film was co-written by Harvey and Bob Weinstein, and was the first release of their company, Miramax (named after the brothers' parents, Max and Miriam), the studio which would later become a major player in Hollywood, and which they continued to run until it was taken over by Disney in 1993. Weinstein, of course, has just announced his intention of moving away from making violent films and is no doubt embarrassed by his gore-filled beginnings.

The pumping, pomptastic synth score was provided by former Yes keyboard player and future Grumpy Old Man, Rick Wakeman. Avoiding the style of *F13*, it is stirring and catchy while also being wonderfully moody. It wasn't Wakeman's first soundtrack, he had scored Ken Russell's bizarre pseudo-biopic of Franz Liszt, *Lisztomania* (1975), and later provided sleazy riffs to the director's 1984 thriller *Crimes of Passion*. It's one of the most memorable and enjoyable soundtracks of the period, moving from rousing to atmospheric in exciting sweeps.

Despite being made after *F13*, Weinstein claimed the script was completed before Sean Cunningham's film. Savini had done the effects for the first *F13*, but passed on the





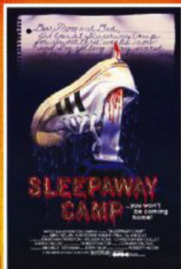
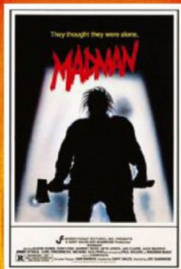
second because he didn't believe Jason should logically be in it, so took his talents to *The Burning*. Some of the gore effects don't hold up to close scrutiny, but were certainly impressive at the time - the killing of the prostitute being particularly effective; one really feels queasy as the long scissors twist, churning the victim's stomach as well as the audiences.

The Burning was released in the UK by Thorn EMI, a highly respected big name during the burgeoning video industry. They were horrified when it became known that the version they released was fifteen seconds longer than the official BBFC X-rated cut. When the video nasty controversy started to pick up steam, the police raided the company's offices and seized the master tapes and stock of cassettes. The film was taken to court on obscenity charges, but was cleared. The defence had made the case that the film was "simply a bogeyman story" and the horror and gore "took up a minuscule amount of a film predominantly made up of some of the most boring teenage dialogue you are ever likely to witness"; some would say it was a fair review. Thorn EMI were still in trouble, however, for releasing the unapproved version and they issued a recall. But because the film was an instant rental hit, and hence a big money-spinner (rental shops paid around £60 per tape), it was re-released straight away in the approved version. Despite the risk of prosecution and being offered the swap for free, many stores held on to the original, as their customers couldn't get enough gore. For collectors, the version to look for has a cassette label with

no printed date on it. It would be several decades before the uncensored version would be available in the UK once again.

The fact that a sequel was never made only bolsters the enduring reputation of *The Burning*. More often than not, further elaborations on stories and themes can have a tendency to weaken a good idea. The film's coda does hint that the murderer's body was never found, but by keeping Cropsy to a one-shot villain, he enters horror film history as a formidable, terrifying killer - even if it's at the expense of his fame.

The story was, not surprisingly, inspired by the New York urban legend of the Cropsy Maniac. A campside tale recounted for over a century to scare the young folk. As was *Madman* (1982), an often overlooked entry to the new breed of video horror. It is a surprisingly entertaining - and often gory - romp through (now) familiar territory. The victims here, however, are not the children at the camp, but the counsellors. They include Gaylen Ross, best known for her lead role in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). The titular psychopath is a burly, brutal farmer who, legend has it, took an axe to his family while they slept one night, prompting the locals to string him up from a tree. However, his body disappeared and it is now said if one so much as whispers the name "Madman Marz" he will come to get you. Naturally, this is a cue for the boisterous adults to shout his name, and they do indeed face the consequences. As well as some decent shots of beheaded



corpses, there's a Jethro Tull-esque song played over the end credits. It's a winner all the way.

One other summer camp video favourite which wasn't so lucky with avoiding the sequel trap was *Sleepaway Camp* (1984). The original instalment lets the viewer get acquainted with introverted outsider Angela (Felicja Rose), sent away to camp and clearly out of her depth. Orphaned and having lost her only sibling in a boating accident, she now lives with her cousin whose doctor mother appears to have stepped right out of a John Waters film - complete with verbal asides to herself. Angela's socially awkward demeanour makes her an easy target for the usual camp bullies, both among the kids and counsellors. There's also a sleazy, paedophile cook who is practically salivating when the youngsters arrive: "I call them baldies", he drools. It's a sign of a different age, as his leanings are overlooked by his fellow staff members. He soon gets his comeuppance when an unseen assailant causes him to suffer third degree burns. One of the things that makes the film stand out is that many of the campers are actually younger (and look it), rather than twenty-somethings playing teens as is usually the case. The first film plays it by-the-numbers with the murders, but makes up for it with its jaw-dropping finale. Whether the upcoming remake will keep the brilliant ending, which ranks among the most shocking ever committed to celluloid and still packs a punch even when one knows it's coming, remains to be seen.





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THE RED, WHITE AND BLUES BROTHERS

Words: Andrew Pollard



Best known for their work in TV, directing shows such as *Community* and *Arrested Development*, it's fair to say the Russo brothers weren't the obvious choice to helm Captain America's second cinematic outing. We got the chance to talk to the comic book obsessed Anthony and Joe Russo about Marvel Studios' latest offering, to find out why *CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER* is in good hands.

Starburst: How did you guys end up involved with the movie?

Joe Russo: It's interesting. Kevin Feige, who runs Marvel, was a huge fan of *Community*, the show that we produced and directed a lot of episodes for. We did a lot of genre-spoofing episodes in that show and I think he saw some of the stuff we did - some paintball episodes at the end of Season 2, the spaghetti western paintball, sort of a *Star Wars* paintball - and I think he just thought to himself these guys should be doing action movies. Marvel have an extensive list of directors that they put together in preparation for talking about each movie, and they take a lot of meetings because a lot of people wanna make their films, and they asked us to come in for a meeting.

Who was involved in that meeting?

Joe: A lot of people at the company - Louis D'Esposito, who is the co-president with them; Nate Moore, who works under Kevin and is a producer on the film and shepherded the movie from its inception with Kevin; Victoria Alonso, who handles this whole section. So it was a very eclectic group and a real experienced group.

How excited were you guys to become part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe?

Joe: Ecstatic! I started collecting comic books when I was 10 years old. One of the first books I ever got was a Captain America and Falcon team-up, so to sit here and talk to you 30 years later is surreal.

Anthony Russo: We've also been extremely huge fans of what they've been doing with the movies and inspired by their choices of directors. They're immersing from that first *Iron Man* movie. The fact we got the opportunity, finally, unexpectedly, to come in and be a part of this was extremely exciting for us.



Given the events of *Avengers Assemble*, where do we pick things up from Steve Rogers in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*?

Anthony: The good thing about this movie is we finally get a chance to catch him up in terms of what the present world is and how he's involved in it, connected to it, and a part of that. A big part of our preparation for the movie was just thinking about how Steve has been spending his time since he's been in the modern day and what he'd been doing with himself and where he was now, so that he wasn't just "oh, the guy from the '40s." He has started to develop his own identity in the modern world and his own sort of relationship to it.

When *Captain America: The First Avenger* was announced, we initially thought that it would be hard to get a *Captain America* movie to work in a modern world where audiences like their heroes to be gritty and flawed. Clearly we were wrong on that front, but did you ever find it hard to make *Captain America* interesting for a modern audience?

Joe: Well, there are potentially components to it that might turn people off. He's a tricky character in terms of his arc, because his code is solid; in the books he doesn't often deviate from the code that really makes him who he is. But by comparison that makes him Rocky or Steve McQueen in *Bullitt*; a character who is given a mission and he gives all he can to execute that mission to the best of his abilities. Rocky's job is he just wants to go the distance, Steve McQueen wants to figure out who killed a witness. They're very simple arcs with a lot of growth to the character in those films and they're very highly entertaining movies. So if you put Cap against the right

"YOU CAN'T BE APOLOGETIC FOR WHAT THE CHARACTER IS BUT AT THE SAME TIME YOU CAN ALSO CHALLENGE IT."

- JOE RUSSO

backdrop, fighting the right antagonist, you can create a very complicated movie and a very complicated narrative to put him in. You can't be apologetic for what the character is but at the same time you can also challenge it. I've been collecting comic books since the 1980s, when it started to become fashionable to do post-modern or deconstruction of interpretations of superheroes. I loved that because it felt like a tweaking of characters that existed in this Golden Age/Silver Age bubble; characters that weren't relatable to me and in my world. And I think that this film is a post-modern examination of a character that really allowed us to put him in a very current, a very topical, situation. Hopefully people will be able to enjoy that.

From what we've seen so far, is it safe to call the movie a spy thriller with plenty of corruption thrown in?

Anthony: It's very much a political thriller. We wanted the movie to be very topical too.



What's exciting about that is finding ways to make the political climate anxiety that we're all feeling very personal to a character in the movie. Definitely what our goal was here was we had a character who came from a time period where the world was more black and white, where it was America versus the Nazis, and to have him move into a modern world where we deal with grey and spies and pre-emptive strikes and all kinds of moral duty that weren't necessarily around when he formed as a human being. And that was really exciting and challenging and certainly feels as if you're going to take the complexity that our organisations are undergoing right now. Cap is trying to navigate that.

Chris Markus, Steve McFeeley and Ed Brubaker worked on the script. How hands on were you guys with it?

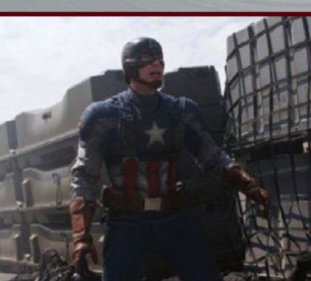
Anthony: One of the things that got us so excited about doing the process was that they had a really strong first draft. At that point, we moved forward, working very closely with them, continuing to refine things and develop characters. We had a very, very close working relationship with that. Having worked in television so much, we love the very intense clamour of spending a lot of time in a room with writers, working through things. It was really fulfilling for all of us.

With the supposed villain of the piece, the Winter Soldier, he's one of the coolest characters in comic books. How rewarding was it to get to bring him to life?

Joe: That's probably the most exciting component of the project for us. As comic book fans, we feel the same way you do—that's one of the coolest characters ever created, for many reasons. Not only is he just a badass—and we love action, and having a character like that really allows us to drive the action in this movie—but also because of his relationship with Cap. It makes him an amazingly interesting and complicated villain. It's a really unique circumstance to get a hero and a villain with such an emotional bond with each other.

Anthony: You were asking earlier about





how do you make the character of Captain America interesting, and there's an adage that says a hero is only as interesting as his villain. That's the great gift of Winter Soldier in the Captain America story - you have this phenomenal villain put up against Cap. How do you threaten a guy who has such a clear moral compass and so much strength? To have a villain who's his former best friend, it creates a certain vulnerability and crack in him that you can't find in any other type of villain. That's exciting, to us, on a storytelling level.

Given that Cap's been about since 1941, there's a huge history of villains to choose from; we were a little surprised that Winter Soldier was chosen so soon. Were there any talks of having any other villains appear? Toby Jones' Armin Zola is back; is he set to play a major role in the film?

Anthony: Unfortunately, we're not supposed to talk about elements that are too connected to the narrative of the story.

'Nuff said. Sam Wilson, aka The Falcon! You talk about how one of your first books was a Cap and Falcon team-up. Was Anthony Mackie always in mind to play that character?

Joe: Yeah, he came up very early on as an idea. When you get to introduce a new superhero to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, it's an incredible opportunity. It's a very thorough process just thinking about it; what the character could be. We certainly went through a long process with Marvel trying to figure out the best version of Falcon in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. But Anthony Mackie came up very early on in that process and he was always up there from the beginning for it, for sure.

From watching interviews and appearances, he comes across as a very likeable, genuine, funny guy.

Anthony: Yeah, that was really important. A lot of people have to deal with losing those who are close to them in life. Cap has lost everybody that's close to him, so he's in a very unique, difficult place on a character level. Finding a new person that Cap can connect with is a very

important process with the growth arc of the character. So Anthony Mackie's qualities were really important for that storytelling.

You mentioned about how Cap's lost everybody that he knows. Hayley Atwell is confirmed to return, so is Steve going to be paying a visit to the older Peggy Carter?

Joe: Again that's another one. There's like a monitor on our hearts that Marvel put on when you take the job, and that heart's going to explode [laughs].

Right, we'll leave that there too. Introducing Falcon, introducing the Winter Soldier, bringing in Robert Redford as Alexander Pierce, Crossbones is in there with Frank Grillo... Was there any consideration of bringing any other new characters to the MCU?

Joe: There's always a consideration when you're at the script stage. There were several iterations of the script that involved other characters. Ultimately, after some work and several months on the script, where we ended up is the gallery of characters that are in this movie.

With such a vast array of characters, how much will the events of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* shape *Avengers: Age of Ultron*?

Joe: There is a significant shift at the end of this movie in the Marvel Cinematic Universe that's a strong hand-off to *Avengers: Age of Ultron*.

You two seem set to return for *Captain America 3*. Is that a deal that's in place in principal, do you have a set idea of where you're looking to take the story of that film, or is it just a case of waiting to see how the rest of Phase Two pans out and then sit down and look at the story?

Joe: Well that's something we can't confirm or deny, that we'll be back for *Cap 3*.

You guys have been big comic book fans for 30 years. What other characters, as fans, would you like to work on?

Joe: We love all comic book characters - we have a massive comic book collection in my closet, in several boxes, and it's very eclectic - but as far as Marvel storylines go that we'd love to do some day, we love *Civil War*, we love *Secret Wars*, *Secret Wars*, when I was 12 or 13, it was very impressionable on me, and I love *Civil War* because it's really good writing. As to whether that would ever be possible with the Marvel properties spread out amongst so many studios, it would be an ambitious undertaking, if not an impossible one, but a dream nonetheless.

With Cap having basically lost everybody and not knowing anyone bar the Avengers team and S.H.I.E.L.D.,

"CAP HAS LOST EVERYBODY THAT'S CLOSE TO HIM, SO HE'S IN A VERY UNIQUE, DIFFICULT PLACE ON A CHARACTER LEVEL."
- ANTHONY RUSSO



how important is his relationship with Black Widow in this movie?

Joe: His relationship with Widow was incredibly appealing to us because she and Cap are such opposites; he has such a strong moral code and her code is to not have a code. Her belief system is that a code can get you killed, and you need the ability to move in amongst your enemy without much moral concern or repercussion. So, for us, it felt like a really great pairing between the two characters as they would always be in conflict on how to deal with issues or conflict. At the same time, we also felt we could create a work-husband/work-wife relationship between the two characters because since *The Avengers* they've been working together quite a bit. In the world of the story and the time that the audience hasn't seen, when we jump into this film Cap and Natasha are effectively partners.

How integral is S.H.I.E.L.D. to the story? It appears that Cap is going to be butting heads with them...

Joe: It's integral to the story. The cool thing about bringing Cap into the modern world is you're gonna have that conflict between his values system and the current values system. He missed a very tumultuous period of American history – the Iraq scandal, 9/11 – and there's a very complicated world that he finds himself in, and S.H.I.E.L.D. represents that world; they're a clandestine organisation whose mission it is to protect us, but Cap takes issue with the philosophy behind that organisation and its desire to remain clandestine.

There hasn't been too much mention of Frank Grillo as Brock Rumlow, aka Crossbones. He's an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. in this?

Joe: Whatever you can gleam from the trailer [laughs].

With him arguably being responsible

for assassinating Cap in the books, it's interesting to see what happens with him. It's great to see some of the smaller characters and smaller roles being brought in, such as Georges St-Pierre as Batroc. How does he fit into the overall picture?

Joe: You want to try and populate the universe with characters that are going to service your story, and we had a need for a character like Batroc in this film, and Georges St-Pierre was perfect casting. The one thing that I will say, in respect to bringing characters into the world, because of being such a dedicated comic book fan, Joss [Whedon] made a very valiant point when he said that this is called the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which makes it different from the comic universe. You have about 2 1/2 hours to tell a story, which is much more limited than multiple-issue runs that involve years. So you make choices based on what will create the maximum narrative effect on the audience in those 2 or 2 1/2 hours that you have. Sometimes that means you stay faithful to the origin of the character in the books, other times that means you make some different choices. I think what makes these movies exciting is there are components that are traditional, that I grew up with, that I expect – and I get those – then there are new twists so that it's fresh and it's not exactly what I've read in the books. It might end up fairly uninspiring viewing if you watch every element of a story that you actually know.

As a comic book fan, it's just great.

Joe: Yeah, and that's the great thing about having a canon as diverse as Cap's and a rogues' gallery as diverse as Cap's; you've got a lot of

different antagonists that represent different levels of threat and different agendas, and those agendas can intertwine or service different parts of the movie. The casting of Georges St-Pierre, we were looking for a real level of realism on the fighting front, so we really wanted to up the physical execution of the fights in the movie. To get one of the top fighters in the world portraying a legendary fighter from the books was perfect.

You've got this French martial artist character with a French-Canadian mixed martial arts legend playing him. It doesn't get much more real than that...

Joe: Exactly! George executed a lot of his own fight sequences in the movie, so 90% of what he's doing out there is Georges.

If you were to return for Captain America 3, who's the one villain that you'd love to work with? Would it be Baron Zemo, a possible return for the Red Skull...

Joe: That's a tough one. It'd be hard to answer because if we did end up doing that movie then I'm sure people would look to that answer as a source of credibility or as bible for what we're going to do with the next film. We wouldn't want to disappoint people.

In a year that's bringing *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* and *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is the one that everybody seems to be looking forward to...

Joe: We're passionate comic book people. For us, to translate the spirit of that book, which I think is one of the best runs in the last 30 years – Brubaker's run on *Winter Soldier* – that's a dream come true.

Hopefully our passion translates to the fanbase.



CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER is released in UK cinemas March 26th.





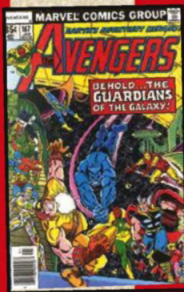
PART 2: 1975 - 2014

BY ANDREW POLLARD

When we last checked in with Steve Rogers, he'd denounced his Captain America title, becoming Nomad, the man without a country. He'd also been a war hero, punched Adolf Hitler, suffered the death of his best friend, been frozen in ice, defrosted, joined the Avengers, and fought the likes of the Red Skull and Baron Zemo more times than Luke Skywalker's drank blue milk. In Part 2 of this comic book retrospective, we pick things up with 'Nomad' in 1975...

NOMAD NO MORE

What, the Nomad identity didn't last? How did you ever see that coming? The dark blue and yellow outfit lasted only four issues, with Steve Rogers returning back to the familiar red, white and blue Cap suit at the end of April 1975's *Captain America* #184. For some illogical reason, as Nomad, Steve turned into an awkward, stumbling mess, even tripping over his own cape at one point. Rogers' official reasoning for returning to the Captain America garb is that he could still champion the ideals of America without having to blindly support the US government. Oh, and the Red Skull just happened to torture and murder Steve's friend Roscoe, who took on the Captain America gig for a short while. Still, we reckon that it was mainly



down to the fact that he was shit with capes that Rogers left Nomad behind, but we'll have to take the Sentinel of Liberty's word on this one.

Now back as Captain America, Steve Rogers' next assignment was one that he had to do a hundred times before: find the Red Skull. Assisting Cap at this point was the Falcon, who had previously decided to go it alone in order to give Harlem a hero that it deserved. In one of Red Skull's more vicious plans, he killed an admiral in front on Cap and Falcon, then proceeded to torture Peggy Carter and Gabe Jones. His reason for this torture, shown in *Captain America #185*, was because the Skull took offence at Carter and Jones' mixed-race relationship. Quite the controversial step from Marvel. Just to further solidify his standing as a nasty piece of work, the Red Skull then used a mind-control device to have the Falcon turn on Cap and attack him. Whilst the two heroes were having a bit of a to-do, the Skull escaped to fight another day.

As the '70s progressed, Steve Rogers would find himself largely teaming with the Falcon, fighting the usual villains of choice like Big Daddy, the Night People, Grawlin, Arim Zola and Nazi X (who was a robot with the mind of Adolf Hitler), working with the Avengers at times, going temporarily blind thanks to a chemical weapon, questioning who Steve Rogers really is, and fighting the good fight as only Cap can. He would also die... although, y'know, there's that whole 'death don't mean shit' in the comic book world. *Avengers #167* started an arc that became known as 'The Korvac Saga', seeing the Avengers going up against a being that was far greater than anything they had ever faced before. Seriously, Korvac was hard. He even killed the Avengers. Dead. Stone dead. Real dead. Totally dead. Permanent dead. Alright, alright, Earth's Mightiest Heroes were brought back to life by Korvac by the time the story came

to a conclusion in *Avengers #177*. Not that he was under the thumb or anything, but Korvac saw the horror on the face of his missus and ended the whole saga, resurrecting the Avengers as a result.

With February 1978's *Captain America #218*, Steve Rogers finally got a chance to look into his past. Something he'd been trying to do for what seemed like forever by this point, although those pesky bad guys kept getting in the way. Not to worry, for a look into his past would also reveal further bad guys. Cap's search brought him across the mysterious Lyle Dekker, a General who was apparently involved in Steve Rogers' World War II days. With Iron Man assisting him, Rogers finds some audiotapes from when the Avengers discovered his frozen body. It's revealed here to readers that Captain America disappeared off the coast of Newfoundland in 1945; something that would be retconned at certain points over the years. Finding out that Dekker was in cahoots with the Red Skull, Cap came up against the beastly Ameridroid; a being that was brought to life by Dekker draining Cap's powers. Not to worry, though, for the Sentinel of Liberty would face off against Dekker at a frozen location in Newfoundland where he would show the General the error of his ways.

The next few years would again find Cap searching for answers amongst the mental blocks that forbid him a clear recollection of his past. Along the way, things would get a tad weird, particularly when the American icon went up against the newly-brought-to-life Lincoln Memorial statue in *Captain America #222*. It would soon be revealed that this was all part of Veda's plans to take out the Sentinel of Liberty. Cap would then go on to regain some of his memories when *Captain America #225* saw Mason Harding unlock the presumed-lost parts of Steve Rogers' past. In the comic book world, these things are never that simple, though, and

Harding's successful probe into Steve's mind saw our hero lose his super-soldier powers. Rather than use Steve Rogers as an everyman and have him protecting the world without his abilities for any real length of time, Marvel decided to have Rogers' powers return by the very next issue, which was convenient for him as he was soon to go up against an entire army of Red Skulls!

With the Nomad moniker now well and truly put behind him, and with his super-soldier powers now back in force, Captain America saw out the rest of the 1970s by mainly assisting Nick Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D., fighting familiar foes like Dr. Faustus, not to mention a tear-up with the Hulk in February 1979's *Captain America #230*, searching to find the missing Falcon, assisting the brother-sister tandem of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch in their quest to discover their true origins, and again looking to move away from the Captain America title in order to become an artist.

PATRIOT GAMES

While the 1980s would prove to be relatively formulaic for Captain America, the involvement of Roger Stern and John Byrne led to some of the decade's finer Cap moments. One such time saw Stern and Byrne have Steve Rogers debating running for President of the United States (June 1980's *Captain America #250*). Whilst the idea was suggested previously by Roger McKenzie and Don Perlin, it was under Stern's editorship that the story made it to print. Even though Rogers' Presidential ideas came to nothing, he had managed to come across some fresh eye-candy along the way, as August 1980's *Captain America #248* saw law student Bernie Rosenthal enter the title as a new love interest for Steve.

As with so many of the characters with



ties to S.H.I.E.L.D., the 1980s would feature various appearances from Life Model Decoys; something that became cringeworthy in so many titles. With the recurring role of LMDs and the regular churning out of the same old villains, including Batroc, Mr. Hyde and Baron Zemo, it's easy to see why it could sometimes be hard to garner interest in the Captain America character. Still, repetitiveness and weak stories will prove a hindrance to even the most bulletproof of heroes.

Sifting through the dirge of 1980s Captain America stories, it would be remiss of us not to highlight 1981's *Captain America* #253, which saw the Sentinel of Liberty heading over to British shores. Initially brought in by 1940s' heroes Union Jack and Spitfire, Cap's assistance was needed in hunting down a killer that was terrorising the UK. Carrying out these heinous acts, it was revealed that the vampire Baron Blood was responsible for this chaos. Playing for keeps, Cap's shield would eventually end up decapitating Blood. Cap stuck around on UK soil for the next few issues before returning the US in *Captain America* #258. A run in with Doctor Octopus would ensue in *Captain America* #259 before August 1981's *Captain America* #260 saw our hero behind bars! Well, that's what the cover would have you believe. What actually happened was that Cap, being the ever-helpful soul that he is, aided the powers that be to test the new security system in place at Rykers Island. Think of his position as similar to Sly Stallone in 2013's *Escape Plan*, although with more coherent dialogue and less testosterone-heavy bromance.

Away from his solo title, Captain America would once again become a part of yet-another new look Avengers in *Avengers* #211. This time out, the rather uninspiring line-up of the team involved Cap, Thor, Tigra, Wasp and Yellowjacket.

Just to make things a tad awkward, Cap also had to oversee the court martial of Yellowjacket for accusations of reckless endangerment. It was also around this time that Cap would face off against the new Nomad, Edward Ferbel, who was patrolling the streets of Los Angeles. This Nomad was being mentored by the mysterious Teacher, who would later be revealed as that damn, dirty Red Skull chap. Skull would be heading up a group known as the Nihilist Order. It's also worth noting that this issue features the one real time where Steve Rogers gets clearly intoxicated, going on a good old-fashioned piss-up with Sam Wilson.

Sharing panel space with a slew of guest-stars and villains usually associated with other superheroes, the next few years would see Cap work with and against the likes of Spider-Man (you may have seen his name once or twice throughout this issue), Hank Pym, the Defenders, Baron Strucker, Spider-villain Vermin, the Falcon, and the newly-formed team of Arnim Zola and Baron Strucker. A few of the more interesting arcs of these years would involve Captain America working with a motorcycle stunt group called Team America (fuck yeah?!), to foil an attempt at replacing Nobel Prize winners with androids in *Captain America* #269 and #270, enter the wrestling ring to unmask the mysterious X in *Captain America* #271, and have his secret identity discovered by his missus, at this point still Bernie Rosenthal.

If you were getting fed up of the same familiar villains by this point, Marvel would look at appeasing this in 1983. Sort of. When the believed-dead Baron Zemo (isn't he always?) captured Cap and killed an old friend of his in *Captain America* #277, things spruced up a little when it was revealed that Baron Zemo was not actually long-time foe Heinrich Zemo but rather his son, Helmut Zemo. Still, different generation, same result as this new Baron

Zemo's plan was also bested. Whilst this was a new take on Baron Zemo, we were also given another new take on the Nomad persona. Jack Monroe, who had earned the name Bucky after assisting an alternative 'Steve Rogers' several years prior, appeared in *Captain America* #281 after a hiatus. Taken under Cap's wing, Monroe decided to take the Nomad name and outfit for himself. After a chequered and often-crazed past, Monroe was looking to put things right and help out Captain America in any way he could. Happy with this helping hand, not everything was going well for Steve Rogers. Around this time, not only did he fall under the spell of Viper, his old friend and S.H.I.E.L.D. agent Dum Dum Dugan suffered a heart attack. Like Rogers, Dum Dum would recover, and the moustachioed veteran would become a Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. One person who wasn't so lucky was the Patriot, an old hero of Cap's World War II days, who succumbed to cancer.

A GOLDEN ERA

Much like Captain America is from a golden age of comic book heroes, the mid-late 1980s would see the character get some of his best stories to date. *Captain America* #286 would see a brief altercation with the new Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.-featured Deathlok, but it was from 1984 that things would really get interesting. After J.M. DeMatta's gave fresh life into the age-old Cap vs Red Skull battle, we saw a Captain America that was pushed further than ever before. Yes, Captain America had suffered great traumas over the years, particularly the loss of Bucky Barnes, but it finally got to the point in *Captain America* #298 where Cap decided that the Red Skull must be killed. In a story involving Baron Helmut Zemo and the Red Skull's daughter, Mother Superior, and with the two legendary figures both aged and poisoned, Cap remarks



to his long-time foe, "I see now the only way I'm ever going to be free of you is to see you dead." Not quite what you'd usually expect to hear from the flag-pumping Steve Rogers. After beating the Skull to a pulp, Cap stops short of delivering the fatal blow, despite the pleas of his enemy to do just that, although his greatest nemesis falls victim to the effects of the poison and passes away in Rogers' arms. Before the Sentinel of Liberty could afford himself even the smallest of celebratory jigs, Bernie would propose to him. With bigger fish to fry, Captain America also found himself whisked off to the Battleworld as part of 1984's infamous Secret Wars storyline. Leading a group of familiar Marvel heroes at the behest of the cosmic Beyonder, Captain America found himself up against a group of various supervillains on the mystical planet. Upon returning to Earth, Steve Rogers would finally accept Bernie's marriage proposal, despite initial hesitation.

Following on from the Red Skull's latest demise - his deceased body was even sent on fire this time - Steve Rogers decided to focus on the future, seeking to rejuvenate himself and the Avengers team. Similarly, the *Captain America* title was also rejuvenated. After J.M. DeMatteis' run, Mark Gruenwald became the writer on the book from July 1985's *Captain America* #307. Gruenwald would go on to have a legendary run with the character, spanning a decade and writing 137 issues until he left the title with September 1995's *Captain America* #443. As well as many memorable stories, Gruenwald also introduced a host of new villains for Cap, such as Crossbones and the snake-themed group dubbed the Serpent Society. The writer's run would bring the Captain America stories to a more political base and looked to explore idealism and national identity.

After being bewitched by newcomer Diamondback in *Captain America* #310,

December 1985's *Captain America* #312 saw Cap get introduced to one of his more famous villains - the FlagSmasher. Living up to his *does-exactly-as-it-says-on-the-tin* moniker, this villain is somebody who's against the very idea of national identity and of countries. Designed to be a similar foil to Captain America as the Red Skull, the FlagSmasher, born Karl Morgenthau, was a freedom fighter who believed that the concept of countries and nationalities caused people to have a sense of arrogance and superiority towards others. As well as a few other throwaway villains, we would shortly get introduced to John Walker, aka the Super-Patriot, in November 1986's *Captain America* #323. Whereas Cap was a patriotic American who fought the good fight, the Super-Patriot was a patriotic American villain. Initially butting heads with Steve Rogers, Walker would have a big part to play in the following year.

In 1987, Steve Rogers hit a big-time low. After several hard battles had left him battered and beaten, Steve had enough of the Captain America gig. Some of the biggest mental scars that Rogers amassed came in *Avengers* #275. A helpless Captain America had to watch the *Avengers'* butler Jarvis get beaten to near-death by Baron Zemo and the Masters of Evil. To rub salt in the wounds, Zemo also destroyed several mementoes that he found in *Avengers* Mansion, including Cap's original shield and the only surviving photograph of Steve Rogers' mother! Bastards. *Captain America* #325 would see Nomad return and *Captain America* #327 saw another appearance from the Super-Patriot as things began to come to a head for Steve Rogers. The icing on the cake for the put-upon Rogers came in *Captain America* #332 when the government issued him with an ultimatum: either become an official operative of the United States or give up everything he had become up until this point. Foreshadowing what was to

come years later in *Civil War*, Steve refused to be controlled by an organisation and handed in his Captain America duds. Rising to the challenge, John Walker, aka the Super-Patriot, was waiting in the wings to become the new Captain America in September 1987's *Captain America* #333.

Writer Mark Gruenwald has previously compared the John Walker Captain America as similar to how James Rhodes took over the Iron Man gig at times, or how Beta Ray Bill stood in as Thor. In fairness to Gruenwald, this change in the book caused an immediate increase in sales. Even though Steve Rogers was still around, Walker would remain the star of the book until *Captain America* #350 as he began to resemble a hero more and more with each passing issue. Joining him, he brought in a former partner of his, Lemar Hoskins, as the new Bucky, later dubbed Battlestar. Meantime, Steve Rogers found himself at a loose end and with a major itch to scratch. By the time *Captain America* #336 hit shelves, Rogers had donned a new costume, calling himself simply 'The Captain.' Working alongside Nomad, Rogers was content to let Walker continue as Captain America. The thing is, Walker would eventually lose the plot and temporarily go insane, largely in part to a pair of former allies revealing his secret identity to the world. Oh, and in case you can't see where this is going, hinting at things to come, *Captain America* #342 saw the ever-thoughtful Black Panther gift Steve Rogers with a new vibranium shield.

With the latest incarnation of Captain America applying brutal methods, not to mention having killed a couple of bad guys, it was down to Steve Rogers to go up against the man who had been chosen as his replacement. When friend D-Man (a horrendous cross between Wolverine and Daredevil - look him up!) nearly perished, February 1989's *Captain America* #350 saw Steve Rogers and John Walker go head-to-head



for the title of Captain America. Your winner and NEW Captain America... Steve Rogers! With Walker seeing the error of his ways and handing over the Cap garb to Rogers on live TV, the now-ex Captain America was taken out by an assassin. Whilst Walker took a little break from action, Rogers returned to the familiar red, white and blue brought about a return for a familiar red face. Resurrected in a cloned Steve Rogers body, the Red Skull, complete with a now-permanently shrivelled, red face, made his big return to the comic book world. During this period, Captain America also found a new Avengers team made up of himself, Reed Richards, Sue Storm, Thor and GIlgamesh.

Presumed dead, John Walker soon made his return also (*Captain America* #354), revealing that his 'death' was merely a staged act so that he could take on another mantle for the US government: U.S. Agent. With Steve Rogers now firmly back in Captain America mode, another new face would join Cap's rogues' gallery: Crossbones. Technically debuting in *Captain America* #359, Brock Rumlow was a skilled hand-to-hand combatant and expert marksman. Throughout his appearances over the coming years, he'd often be seen as a henchman for the Red Skull. He would also go on to play a major part in one of the biggest Captain America stories of all time.

A YEAR IN THE LIFE

With the arrival of the 1990s came a mixed bag of stories. Rogers' time seemed to be split between cleaning up the drug-riddled streets of America and fighting intergalactic wars in outer space. Along the way there would be run-ins with some familiar adversaries, and Cap would also find himself, for various reasons, fighting against other heroes such as Daredevil and Namor the Submariner. The Sentinel of Liberty even got a

retelling of his origin story starting in October 1991's *Adventures of Captain America* #1. It's also worth noting that the '90s would give John Walker's U.S. Agent his own brief miniseries, with *U.S. Agent* #1 hitting in June 1993. Away from retellings and supporting character based stories, the main Captain America title would really shift into gear in 1994, for it was at this time that Steve Rogers was given just one year left to live. In *Captain America* #425 it was revealed that the Super Soldier serum that gave Rogers his powers had run its course, meaning that his time was running out!

Being the do-gooder that he is, Steve Rogers decided to spend that final year making the world a better place. Of course, there would be hurdles waiting for our red, white and blue icon at every avenue, not least when a new Super-Patriot decided to dress up as Captain America in *Captain America* #426 in order to tarnish his good name. During this time, not content with featuring the voluptuous curves of Diamondback and Black Widow, the title also added a heroine by the name of Free Spirit to its ranks, and she'd debut in *Captain America* #431 battling Baron Zemo. Not satisfied with its already hefty offering of star-spangled heroes, the book then brought in Jack Flag, another protector of America who needed mentoring by Captain America.

As the rot began to set in, *Captain America* #436 saw Captain America collapse mid-battle, leaving his merry bunch of helpers to take down Mr. Hyde and Cobra. The demise of Steve Rogers was clear for all to see, with the inevitable end seemingly just a matter of time. Similar to how people give crippled dogs those brilliant/cruel/awkward wheels to replace lame limbs, Steve Rogers was given some new armour, an exoskeleton of sorts, to help prolong his effectiveness as Captain America. In fairness, you'd think that after so many years of service the guy could just be made comfortable and left

in peace, but no, it looked like the powers that be wanted to get every last drop of Super-Soldier serum out of their investment.

After exchanging blows for one last time with the likes of FlagSmasher, the Super-Patriot, Dead Ringer and A.I.M., the end was in sight. In an emotionally-charged storyline, *Captain America* #443 detailed the final 24 hours of the life of Steve Rogers. Off into the sunset strode the faithful servant of the American dream, having said his goodbyes to his nearest and dearest, at one with the fate that was about to dawn upon him. And like that, Steve Rogers was no more.

KEEP YOUR ENEMIES CLOSER

What, you didn't get teary-eyed and make a break for the Kleenex? Really? Are you that heartless? Okay, you win: Steve Rogers didn't actually die. A mere two issues later, in *Captain America* #445, Rogers awoke in a strange facility, unsure of what had gone on. It was revealed that a last-minute blood transfusion had saved his life, giving him a new impetus and motivation. Whilst his non-death wasn't that surprising, the reveal that the blood was actually that of the Red Skull's was quite the shock to the system. Speaking of which, in Cap's absence, the Skull had implemented a New Reich on the world. Clearly this got Cap's attention, although the lifelong enemies would end up having to put their differences aside. Trapped in the insanity of the Cosmic Cube, Captain America and the Red Skull would have to join forces in *Captain America* #447. As expected, this uneasy alliance doesn't last long and by the next issue the two have gone their own ways. Whilst Cap managed to escape the Cube, the Sentinel of Liberty also got to see the apparent demise of the Red Skull. What, you're not convinced by that either? Yeesh, tough crowd.



After the whole Cosmic Cube debacle, Steve Rogers was hit where it hurts. The equivalent of a football to the groin, the President of the United States took away the icon's citizenship and asked him to kindly vacate the USA. Cap would flee to England, complete with Sharon Carter in tow, and take down a few bad guys before being invited back by the US President. Still, all of this proved completely irrelevant when the menace of Onslaught dominated across the Marvel world, essentially wiping out all existence. And with that convenient event began a whole new spin on the Marvel characters that had been set in stone for so many decades. Not to be left out, Cap was given a relaunch with November 1996's *Captain America (Vol 2) #1*. In a shocking revelation, we arrive on the scene as Steve Rogers awakes to find himself surrounded by his wife and children.

Unaware as to where he was and what had gone on previously, it was only when given the iconic Captain America shield that Steve Rogers' memories came flooding back. And just to piss on his chips, it was revealed that his happy little family were actually Life Model Decoys, with Nick Fury breaking the news to Cap in *Captain America #2*. The return of Captain America was also met with anger by the Red Skull, now alive and heading up the World Party. Doing the Skull's bidding, Crossbones was tasked with taking out Cap for good. Eventually captured and at the mercy of the Red Skull and Master Man, Captain America had to literally fight for his life and the life of Sam Wilson. It just also happened to be revealed that a new Bucky, Ricki Barnes, had also been captured by the Skull. This time out, the Red Skull was planning to launch a missile attack against the US, but this plan was foiled by Wilson, aka the Falcon. Sadly for Falc, he was dealt some life-threatening wounds as a result. Ever the giver, Wilson was saved by a transfusion of Captain America's

blood. Following on from this, Cap would team with this new Bucky to take down the combined threat of M.O.D.O.K., A.I.M. and Baron Zemo in *Captain America #6*, although X-Men fave Cable would also assist the Sentinel of Liberty in this task. In the aftermath of this, again questioning the powers that be, Cap quit his S.H.I.E.L.D. gig, citing his disappointment in the US government as the main reason. From here he would once more seek to discover the true American spirit. To do so, Cap and Bucky went on their travels and looked to find some sense of national identity along the way. Well, that was until the planet-devouring Galactus turned up in *Captain America #12*. As ever, where there is Galactus there is his herald, and the Silver Surfer turned up in the nick of time. Using Captain America's shield, the Surfer defeated Galactus but only at the cost of his own life. And then, the world came to an end with a 'white out' at the end of *Captain America #13*, which led to Cap returning to his former timeline. Confused? Yeah, this was the late-'90s, folks.

RELAUNCHED

After the brief 13-issue *Heroes Reborn* experiment, Captain America was relaunched, this time with Mark Wald, who had initially taken over from Mark Gruenwald, back at the helm for *Captain America (Vol 3)*. The initial key plot point in this latest relaunch of Captain America was that Cap went without his legendary shield for around two years after losing it in an underwater battle with HYDRA. In its place, the Star-Spangled Avenger would often use an energy-based equivalent and, even at times, use a replica of his original World War II shield. Despite being a freshened up take on the character, Captain America still found himself treading water and fighting run-of-the-mill villains that he had seen before. The only real

change of pace was that the alien Skrulls would get involved at certain points or that Cap would find himself shipped off to the Savage Land. In what was an impressive new addition, the title also introduced Protocol in April 2000's *Captain America #28*, who was the result of a failed Super-Soldier test before Steve Rogers was given the goods. There would also be revelations in *Captain America #39* when the leader of A.I.M. was revealed to be the brother of Rogers' then girlfriend Connie Ferrari.

As 2001 progressed, the horrendous 9/11 attacks occurred. The shockwaves felt around the world were recognised in the comic book world, especially in *The Amazing Spider-Man*. With a whole host of Marvel's famous heroes given New York as their home, it was only right that the atrocities dealt out to the city were acknowledged in the comic books. Whilst Spider-Man, as Marvel's poster boy, was the character most featured in assisting in the post-9/11 clean-up, Captain America, along with the likes of Daredevil and even Doctor Doom, would be shown in a united front as America looked to recover from the destruction that she had experienced.

Back in his own book, things weren't much chirpier as December 2001's *Captain America #48* saw a long-delayed (just a tad...) memorial service take place for Bucky Barnes. Seriously, the guy dies nearly 50 years ago and is only now celebrated? We reckon if he were to ever come back to life then he'd clearly have a massive chip on his metal shoulder. But that would never happen, right?

Ever seen the under-the-radar British documentary *A Complete History of my Sexual Failures*? That kinda feels like the Captain America story. Now we're not saying that Cap has public hair surrounding his toilet, likes to be whipped or has a 'small soldier' but it seems that his luck in love is disappointing at best. *Captain*



America #49 sees Steve Rogers take a fishing trip with Sam Wilson. Leaving the monks of Captain America and the Falcon behind, the two have a heart-to-heart, leading Steve to look up a couple of his ex-girlfriends in *Captain America* #50. Connie Ferrari gets a visit and friendly reconciliation from Rogers whilst Sharon Carter gets a visit and a sickeningly soppy promise that he could never love another. But with that, the Captain would again undergo a relaunch...

THE COLD BITE OF WINTER

Captain America (Vol 4) #1, saw a flashback to the 9/11 atrocities and Cap refusing an order from Nick Fury to fly out and fight in Afghanistan. In the present day of the book, we found Captain America fighting terrorists and deciding to make a huge decision that would change his life completely. Yes, finally, Steve Rogers revealed to the world that he was Captain America, setting up a new home in the Red Hook district of Brooklyn. With Steve Rogers now the name on everybody's lips, the Sentinel of Liberty went about fighting the terrorist threat across the globe. Now as relevant as he'd ever been, Captain America would stand up for America on a global scale over the next few years... although his world was about to be shook to its core.

With yet another relaunch in 2005, making the latest title *Captain America* (Vol 5), a mysterious assassin stepped into the world of Captain America. Not just any assassin but the best assassin that had been seen in the Marvel world by this point. So much so, even the Red Skull was taken out and killed by this mystery man. On the side of this, the Falcon was being heavily monitored by the powers that be after some erratic behaviour, and Cap is again faced with the threat of Crossbones. Still, despite fighting various villainous entities over the next issues, the subtle threat of this mystery assassin lingered large in Cap's mind, with him starting to think that something unbelievable was happening. This all came to a head in *Captain America* #11 when a secret file turned up at Steve Rogers' door - a file that revealed his worst fears: that Bucky Barnes was alive!

Just how was Bucky Barnes, presumed perished in a Baron Zemo-planned attack, alive and in the modern day? It was revealed that, similar to Cap, Bucky was frozen in ice after the airplane explosion. Whereas Cap was found by the Avengers, Bucky was found by some Soviet agents. When they found him, Cap's sidekick was missing an arm and was suffering from major amnesia. Giving him a metal arm and making him a master assassin, Bucky was now christened the Winter Soldier. Frozen between missions, the Winter Soldier, again like Cap, didn't really age, hence why his modern day appearance has him looking relatively fresh faced. As mentioned, this amped-up, badass version of Bucky Barnes had taken out both the Red Skull and Nomad. Without any of his early memories, the Winter Soldier is sent to retrieve the Cosmic Cube. Coming up against Captain America, the lethal Winter Soldier has no recollection of his previous friendship with Steve Rogers. With Cap in possession of the Cube, he manages to bring back all of Bucky Barnes' memories for him. Confused, angered and near-insane, Bucky was believed dead after destroying the Cosmic Cube, although he would appear again in the near future.

As the Winter Soldier's presence came to an end, 2006 and 2007 saw a huge landmark event for Marvel: *Civil War*. Pitting heroes against heroes, Captain America was pivotal in the arc as he fought against the Tony Stark-championed Superhero Registration Act. Leading a group that were against giving up their identities and becoming government-controlled agents, Steve Rogers literally went to war with Iron Man et al in one of the greatest storylines in modern comic books. By the time *Civil War* came to an end, though, Steve Rogers gave himself up to the higher-ups that wanted everything regimented. As a result of his strong actions against the Superhero Registration Act, Rogers was indicted on criminal charges, sending shockwaves throughout the comic book world, April 2007's *Captain America* #25

saw the culmination of *The Death of Captain America* arc, where Steve Rogers is gunned down outside a federal courthouse. If ever Steve Rogers was dead, this was it. Over the next few issues it was revealed that the puppet master behind Rogers' death was none other than the Red Skull. One other key piece of this puzzle is Crossbones, who was the 'hired gun' who fired the fatal bullet. Also involved was Dr. Faustus, who posed as a S.H.I.E.L.D. psychiatrist and gave Sharon Carter a hypnotic suggestion to shoot Rogers at close range in order to seal the deal.

In the aftermath of the death of Steve Rogers came the *Fallen Son: The Death of Captain America* miniseries from June, 2007 until August that year. This series focussed on the shocked superhero world mourning the loss of the Sentinel of Liberty. Steve Rogers was also given a send-off at Arlington National Cemetery, although it was then revealed that Tony Stark had taken Rogers' body to the Arctic and left his corpse with Namor to look after. Stark would then receive a mysterious letter in September 2007's *Captain America* #30 that featured a request from Steve Rogers for Bucky Barnes to become Captain America. Safe to say, he wasn't taken out by the Cosmic Cube as presumed, and so Bucky gave in and took on the iconic title of Captain America, although he would make some modifications to the traditional Captain America garb and would incorporate a pistol and a knife as part of the overall package.

Whereas Crossbones was heralded as the man who killed Steve Rogers, it was actually Sharon Carter's close-range shot that had apparently been responsible for the death of Rogers. With August 2009's *Captain America: Reborn* #1, it was revealed that Rogers didn't actually die (how did you guess?) and that Carter's gun caused Rogers to phase in and out of space and time. After an ever-familiar tussle with the Red Skull, Steve Rogers returned and gave Bucky Barnes his blessing to carry on as Captain America. By this point, the President of the United States also gives Rogers a full pardon for his anti-registration actions.

Over the last few years, Steve Rogers has had various responsibilities in the Marvel world, be it as the Executive Director of S.H.I.E.L.D., as a member of the Avengers, or as Captain America once more. Similarly, Bucky Barnes was again presumed dead only to return and once more become the Winter Soldier, this time on the side of good. Steve Rogers would continue to be Steve Rogers, with his last major act of note being to form the Avengers Unity Squad, consisting of Avengers and X-Men, in the aftermath of the devastating Avengers vs. X-Men story arc.

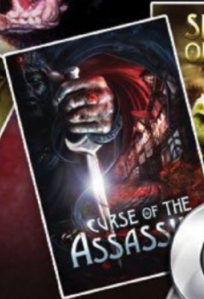
And with that, we bring our comprehensive guide to Captain America's comic book history to a close. Here's hoping that *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* can continue the momentum that Marvel Studios and Disney have created and that Cap gets another big-screen outing worthy of his legacy!



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STARBURST gets under the skin of THE MACHINE...

by Paul Rinker



Ever since James Cameron's Terminator, the word "Machine" has sent a shiver down the spine of sci-fi fans everywhere. Caradog James' award-winning British independent science-fiction film *The Machine* hypothesises an impending cold war between China and the west, and a race between the two sides to develop the most advanced self-conscious AI.

From this emerges the classic moral story of good versus evil, between those who would use the technology to better mankind and those who would use it as a means of destruction. Creating a modern retelling of Frankenstein, James intertwines his moral tale with the story of a father's love for his daughter. Tackling the "big ideas" science-fiction is capable of confronting, it is all done within the shell of a thrilling drama that offers an emotional, thought-provoking and entertaining experience.

Ahead of its release, STARBURST spoke with the film's writer/director Caradog James, lead actress Caity Lotz and villain Denis Lawson...

Starburst: Can you recall the moment you first discovered science-fiction?

Caradog James: As a kid the science-fiction stories that I remember, and which have been formative for me as a filmmaker have all been movies – *Blade Runner*, *The Thing*, *E.T.* and *Star Wars*. These are the ones that gave me my science-fiction tick.

Caity Lotz: The first science-fiction thing I saw was the television mini-series *Taken*, with Dakota Fanning. I was off school sick and I remember how my dad and I watched the entire mini-series in one day.

Denis Lawson: My dad took me to see a movie in Keith, a black and white American movie called *The Incredible Shrinking Man* that had quite an impact.

How different would screen sci-fi be without literary science-fiction?

Caradog James: Well it was only as I got older that I discovered Asimov. Of course literary science-fiction is much more rewarding in a way, although to be honest it's been less of an influence on me. It's interesting because perhaps the problem is not enough filmmakers do read Asimov or the other great science-fiction authors who are out there. As a result some of their science-fiction movies can feel a little bit shallow. But this is why I didn't want to go to fiction as a resource for my movies, and it is the

reason why I bypassed fiction and went to fact. It is amazing how fact is so much stranger than fiction but also how it is so much more interesting.

What was the genesis of the film?

Caradog James: I spent almost a year researching the script before I started writing it. The film's producer John Giwa-Amu put together an off the record meeting with a guy working at the Ministry of Defence, who was actually building intelligent machines. It was amazing to have an opportunity to speak with this guy. They started off masking a slug brain, then a mouse brain and then when I spoke with him they were working on a chimp brain. Extrapolating from that you could see that it's not going to be long before they start to map the human brain, and then of course

"The film's producer put together an off the record meeting with a guy working at the Ministry of Defence, who was actually building intelligent machines."

— CARADOG JAMES
(DIRECTOR)





there is a female character in bad science-fiction they kind of sexualise them, and they are not given their own story. With *The Machine* I really wanted to write a strong female character that was interesting and dynamic; someone that you wanted to understand rather than to just look at.

Once Vincent (Toby Stephens) has created the Machine, he doesn't know how to connect with it because he's not thought beyond the point of creation; beyond the fulfilment of his dream...

Caradog James: It's also part of a larger idea. I truly believe that whether it takes fifty years or a hundred years we will create intelligent machines. But by the very nature of intelligence it has to have emotion because emotion helps us make sense of the world. So these emotional and intelligent machines in effect will be our children, and like any parent, how those children behave is down to how we behave towards them. If we mistreat these kids, if we are a bad parent then that will only reap bad consequences. But I quite like that idea of exploring the connections between the family unit, and how these thinking machines will respond to us who are effectively their parents.

Caity Lotz: One of the things I always loved about this film was how the Machine is in some ways the most humane character out of everyone; even though she is not human. It's kind of cool to explore that idea, and to question how people would react to it? I think a lot of humans are afraid of this image of the future where machines are more powerful or intelligent, and it's that fear which drives them to do bad things.

Following up on Caity's previous thought, would you say *The Machine* is a discussion about the future we are creating and whether we need to fear it?

Caity Lotz: Well I think we are obsessed with control; humans are so desperate to control everything and that's what causes the fear. It

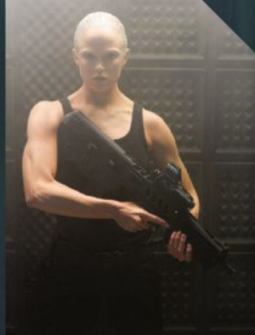
you ask yourself the question - if they've got a copy of the human brain, then what's the difference between the copy and the original? What does it mean to be human? The guy from the MOD was influential in a core strand of the story because of what he said - they're teaching their machines to interact with the world in the same way that some severely disabled children are taught to interact with the world. After that I then went to meet families who had severely autistic children and families with Rett syndrome. It was that real world research that led me to the heart of the movie - to Vincent's story, which I didn't have until I interviewed those people. I met with them and I spoke to them about their routine, their problems and their lives. Fact, real world research and speaking to people is much more interesting and important to me

as a filmmaker than literature or even cinema when it comes to storytelling. The fact that the film's ideas were sparked by research rather than just with me making stuff up helps give it a slightly different feel compared to a lot of the other films that are out there.

One of the film's central themes is the family dynamic and the attachment of children to their parents...

Caradog James: That's exactly what I was after. I saw a film that I hated a couple of years before *The Machine* called *Splice*. I really hated that movie, and the reason I hated it so much was because of the sexual relationship between the creator and the creature. So with *The Machine* I was much more interested in that not being there. I always felt that when





is the same thing with animals, and it's why humans kill them or cage them if they don't understand or they fear them. That's the same problem that comes up in the film. You can't stop progress; it's inevitable and it's coming, whatever it may be. So I don't think there's really any point in trying to fight or stop technology. I also think it will be a gradual shift. It's not like all of a sudden we're going to have conscious machines.

Denis Lawson: It's interesting isn't it? Of course there is an innate fear of it all running away from you if you develop machines. As we talk about in the film - a conscious machine which can therefore think for itself and make decisions on its own. So the idea of that is innately a bit scary to us because yes, we could lose control. It's like *The Terminator* - imagine if we lost control and machines took over. It's interesting having this conversation because

is it that far away - probably not because the capacity is not that far ahead of us. But [when it comes to the future] I'm an optimist.

Caitly Lotz: I do think humans are going to become more machine-like - similar to limbs being replaced and hearing aids and all these things that will fix whatever's wrong; whether someone has lost a limb and there will be a mechanical one to replace it. I do think that we are going to start to see more and more of that, and it will not just be replacing, but it will be used to enhance eyes so that we can see through walls or see in the dark. It will just be a natural progression in which humans will just become more like machines.

Caradog James: Despite the feeling that the film gives, I am actually quite positive about the future. Everything I've read about where we are going and how the technology is going

to... I'm very pro-technology; I'm not anti-technology at all. What I am anti is what we as humans tend to do with technology. GPS is fantastic for making sure you don't get lost, but it was developed by the government to help their smart bombs blow people up. This is what the film is about for me - the difference in terms of the wonders of technology and where all this computing power could take us. How it could elevate us as a species and the dangers of letting all that power and all that possibility fall into the hands of the military establishment and corrupt politicians. Unfortunately since both those two people run most countries around the world, it is a very difficult battle that we must wage in order to make sure technology is used to better mankind rather than to destroy mankind.



THE MACHINE will be available on DVD, Blu-ray and select VOD from March 31st.



MOVIE REVIEWS



UNDER THE SKIN

Cert: 15 / Director: Jonathan Glazer / Screenplay: Walter Campbell, Jonathan Glazer / Starring: Scarlett Johansson, Antonia Campbell-Hughes, Paul Brannigan / Release Date: Out Now

Hollywood superstars tackling unusual roles, in arty films, perhaps shot in unusual locations too, isn't anything particularly new. However, the usually glamorous and drop-dead gorgeous Scarlett Johansson dressed not too dissimilar to a lady of the night and driving around the council estates of Glasgow, in a crappy workman's van, must surely take first prize in sheer WTF-ness? That she's also playing a man-eating-alien-in-disguise is the proverbial cherry on top.

Director Jonathan Glazer has taken Michel Faber's satirical novel, *Under the Skin*, and crafted a cult-classic-in-the-making sci-fi drama. It's a very moody work of art that could well be as much a dissection of the concept 'movie star as an otherworldly being' as it is an existential fantasy about a visitor

from another planet. Johansson's performance is quite brilliant and toys with the creepiness and shallowness of the male gaze and accompanying desires in a way that give the narrative huge thematic resonance, even if some will struggle with a movie that demands your absolute attention.

The alien has clearly picked up lessons in Base Male Fantasy 101 by observing what is most likely to turn Earthling dudes on. So, the extraterrestrial 'black widow' appears in the guise of what looks like, well, a hooker. Appearances and deceptions not only propel *Under the Skin*'s narrative, they also inform the very casting of Johansson. To further enhance the sheer otherworldliness of watching a trashy-looking American actress wander around Glaswegian streets unnoticed, Glazer inserts what look very much like 'stolen shots'.

funny, comically cruel even, and later on, during a chance encounter with a man suffering from what looks like Proteus syndrome, poignant. The blokes she kidnaps can't quite believe their luck, in fact. They don't stop once to ponder the utter artificiality of the scenario, nor recognise their impending doom in the liquid chamber of a discreetly hidden spaceship (disguised as a derelict house). Minimalist and opaque it will be, but Glazer draws surrealist humour from the material. Take a good look at the 'men' that assist in the 'female' alien's mission to harvest food: they ride around on motorcycles, dress up in leathers and, most importantly, wear helmets with visors – they're spacemen in plain sight!

Fans of mainstream sci-fi might not get on with *Under the Skin*. It is a far cry from the enjoyable romp that was *Avengers Assemble* (2012) or even Spike Jonze's recent Oscar-winning dramedy, *Her*, which featured Johansson's husky voice as Samantha, an operating system that gives Joaquin Phoenix's sadsack character the tingles.

Martyn Conterio

EXPECTED  **7**
ACTUAL  **7**





ONLY LOVERS LEFT ALIVE

Cert: 15 / **Director & Screenplay:** Jim Jarmusch / **Starring:** Tom Hiddleston, Tilda Swinton, Mia Wasikowska, John Hurt, Anton Yelchin / **Release Date:** Out Now

Legendary indie director Jarmusch gets in on the vampire film in his own unique way, and comes up with a brilliant transcendental experience.

Adam and Eve (Hiddleston and Swinton) are a married couple living on different continents. Eve in Tangier, living a bohemian but solitary

lifestyle. Musician Adam in Detroit, composing on his archaic, analogue equipment and much more reclusive. Adam's only friend, Ian (Yelchin) acts as his portal to the outside world, securing his fix of expensive, rare guitars, and accepts a commission to produce a wooden bullet. The

pair are centuries old vampires, living off a diet of safely acquired blood; Adam's from a hospital, Eve's from Elizabethan poet and fellow vamp, Christopher Marlowe (Hurt). Sensing her beau is depressed, she travels across the world to be with him; their idyllic lifestyle only broken when Eve's wayward sister, Mia (Wasikowska) turns up.

Trust a maverick like Jarmusch to produce a vampire film that, while it lacks bite and fright, is thoroughly engrossing and immersive. It's a dialogue-filled film, but has so many rich flourishes which mesmerise, and an equally stunning score by Jozef van Wissem. The similarities of the vampire lifestyle and addictions are obvious, and handled with the director's usual wit; a nightclub scene, for example, has 'dealer' Ian selling a rare vinyl record as if it were heroin. It's a film which will appeal to the hipster crowd, who will no doubt delight in the


retro-chic of Adam's abode (his laptop is connected to an old CRT television and he has reel-to-reel recording equipment lining the walls) and numerous cultural references ('There's Jack White's house'). However, it's coolness has substance, and never feels forced. Although it's melancholic, brooding atmosphere may be heavy going for casual viewers.

Both leads are brilliant: Hiddleston no doubt destined to be a poster boy for the post-Edward crowd with his rock star flowing locks and sullen demeanour and Swinton is enigmatically resplendent in her usual, unique, kooky way.

While it's not a film for every taste, like the very best O'negative, it is absolutely delicious.

Martin Unsworth

EXPECTED  **7**

ACTUAL  **9**





THE STRANGE COLOUR OF YOUR BODY'S TEARS

Cert: 18 / **Director & Screenplay:** Hélène Cattet, Bruno Forzani / **Starring:** Klaus Tange, Ursula Bedena, Joe Koener, Jean-Michel Vovk, Birgit Yew, Sylvia Camarda, Sam Louwyck, Anna D'Annunzio, Manon Beuchet, Hans de Munter / **Release Date:** April 11th

One of the most bizarre films in recent years, *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears* is directors Cattet and Forzani's follow-up to *Amer*. It follows a man called Dan Kristensen (Tange - who looks like a cross between the Bounty Hunter from *The X-Files* and Peter Capaldi) searching for his missing wife.

After waking up with no recollection of what's happened to her, he begins to investigate the mysterious old Belgian apartment block where they live, alerting a police detective (Koener), who begins to suspect him.

The search turns into a nightmarish journey as Dan encounters strange characters with equally weird tales as he starts to witness a terrifying world of sex and violence. Despite this, the film is not as pornographic or gory as you might think, with an overtly arthouse tone - *Videodrome* meets *Delicatessen*, with the surrealism somewhere in-between.

There are several shots of eyes in-between fast cuts, disorientating camera angles and overbearing, uncomfortable music straight from *Irreversible*.

The film starts strongly, both intriguing and foreboding, but the rest of it is hit and miss. Some scenes are shown over and over again - particularly one with an annoying doorbell - and there is a sudden, self-aware sidestep into another story (at which point Dan knowingly asks 'What has this got to do with my wife?').

The experiments with colour, sound, stop-frame techniques and some leather S&M that Pinhead would be proud of all contribute to a thoroughly fascinating film that pays homage to '70s European

horror, but unfortunately the audience is often left confused and unsatisfied when the tension has started to build only for the direction of the story to be suddenly interrupted. A shorter, more focused film would perhaps be more satisfying but then again, this film wasn't meant to follow the rules.

Jonathan Anderson

EXPECTED  **5**
ACTUAL  **6**





300: RISE OF AN EMPIRE

Cert: 15 / Director: Noam Murro / Screenplay: Zack Snyder, Kurth Johnstead / Starring: Rodrigo Santoro, Eva Green, Sullivan Stapleton / Release Date: Out Now

The follow up to the now-iconic *300* is pretty much what you'd expect – lots of stylized gory violence, with slow-mo shots and six-packs aplenty, all in impressive 3D.

Murro's *Rise of an Empire* is a prequel, concurrent story and sequel to *300* all in one, based on Frank Miller's upcoming graphic novel *Xerxes*. Early on we see the impressive

transformation from Xerxes the hairy soldier through to the 10-foot tall enigmatic god-king introduced in the previous instalment (both Rodrigo Santoro). However, there isn't as much of him as one would like – the main focus of the movie is on his bitter commander Artemisia (Green), doing his dirty work while he rules from a golden throne.

While the 300 Spartans are putting in a shift of work elsewhere, the popular Athenian general Themistokles (Stapleton) has the small task of uniting all of Greece against Persia, including Spartan queen Gorgo (Headey), Diliros (Wenham) and others returning from the first film. More familiar faces also return in the form of cameos, but very briefly and without impact.

The battle of wits between Themistokles and Artemisia make for an interesting movie, especially as the main battles take place at sea. Several new characters are introduced, buffed up from historic Greek workout regimes of course, and there is one of the angriest sex scenes you'll ever see.

Unfortunately, *Rise of an Empire* is a victim of its own precedent – it's something you've seen before and feels neither as new or fresh as *300*. The normally reliable Green hams it up a little too much, and although a new cast (including Jack O'Connell and Callan Mulvey as father and son soldiers) add something to

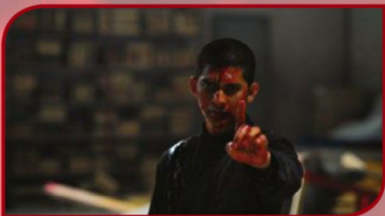
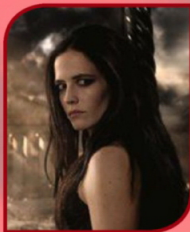
the proceedings, it's all been done before.

Sullivan Stapleton takes up Gerard Butler's reins well and there may be another film in the franchise yet. *Rise of an Empire* is worth a watch, with a couple of new lines to quote and some comedic moments, but falls slightly short of its predecessor.

Jonathan Anderson

EXPECTED 7

ACTUAL 6



THE RAID 2

Cert: 18 / Director: Gareth Evans / Screenplay: Gareth Evans Starring: Iko Uwais, Arifin Putra, Tio Pakusodewo / Release Date: April 11th

The *Raid 2* is a tour de force of story and action filmmaking by Welsh-born Evans that ranks up there with the works of masters such as John Woo, Seijun Suzuki and Takeshi Kitano.

Opening two hours after *The Raid* ended, we find Rama (Uwais) and the two other survivors taking sanctuary in a safe house run by an undercover rogue detective with an agenda

to rid the city of corrupt cops and their criminal conspirators. Reluctantly, Rama takes the assignment to pose as a prisoner named Yuda in order to get close to Uco (Putra), a crime boss' son, and penetrate his father's organisation, exposing the dirty cops. Told it'll be a six month undercover job, Rama learns while in prison that a corrupt judge has sentenced him to serve

out his cover crime's sentence in full... three years.

During an insane, muddy prison fight in the rain, Rama saves Uco's life and is later indoctrinated into the gang after serving his sentence. It's here Rama enters a world of double and triple-crosses. Who is friend and who is foe, and how deep will Rama use his cover in order to get justice? As Rama learns, there's no such thing as a clean war in this world.

Evans has created a plethora of memorable adversaries for our conflicted hero to face, including a homeless, caveman-like assassin, the Baseball Bat Man (who carries a bat and ball with the names of

his victims on it), and Hammer Girl (a kickass, double-hammer-wielding killer). The cast, cinematography and sound are all to be commended; there's no lack of expertly choreographed, bone-crunching fight sequences on offer; and the shoot-outs will impress even the most demanding of action fans. *The Raid 2* is that rarest of sequels – one that miraculously manages to improve on its predecessor.

Whitney Scott-Bain

EXPECTED 9

ACTUAL 9





KHUMBA: A ZEBRA'S TALE

Cert: U / **Director:** Anthony Silverston / **Screenplay:** Rafaella Delle Donne, Anthony Silverston / **Starring:** Liam Neeson, Jake T. Austin, Steve Buscemi, Laurence Fishburne, Richard E. Grant, Catherine Tate / **Release Date:** April 11th

Heard the one about the zebra with only half his stripes? Never mind, it wasn't very funny anyway. *Khumba: A Zebra's Tale* is a South African 3D animation where the laughs are even more scarce than the water in the drought inflicted desert where Khumba and his zebra tribe live.

When Khumba, the half-striped zebra is born, his superstitious herd blame him for the drying up of their safely enclosed water hole in the middle

of the Karoo desert. After his mother dies and a silent but sage praying mantis leaves Khumba a map to a mythological magic water hole, Khumba sets out on a journey to discover himself and hopefully earn his stripes. Along the way he meets a sassy wildebeest, flamboyant ostrich, confused Springboks and has to evade hungry evil leopard Phango.

When the night sky is the most interesting part of a film, you know there's a problem.

Though it shares DNA with the likes of *The Lion King*, *Madagascar* and *Finding Nemo*, *Khumba* has little of the charm, wit or loveable characters of any of these. Children are spoiled with great animated films these days and though Khumba looks pretty and has some good voice work (particularly from Liam Neeson), it will struggle to hold the attention of even the most patient kiddies.

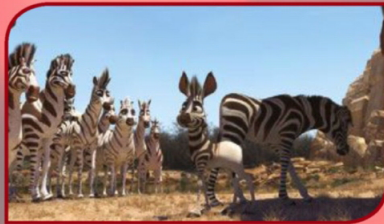
Adults might find the odd bit of distraction in the star lit skies, stunning landscapes and beautiful sunsets, but there is little in the script or the story that make this trip through the desert worth taking. The message of respecting and celebrating diversity is lost beneath the silliness, and though there are Australian bunnies, Scottish eagles and British ostriches, the African voice cast are sadly sidelined in forgettable supporting roles.

Richard E. Grant is on comic relief duties but mostly falls flat on his ostrich face; Catherine Tate

pops up as a disturbed sheep (more sad than funny) and Laurence Fishburne is wasted as Khumba's boring one-note father. Only Neeson and Steve Buscemi seem to chew on their roles with the former given a character that teeters on the brink of becoming truly interesting. Kids will be amused by some of the other characters Khumba meets along the way with the South African Springboks being particularly funny in a single scene, but most viewers will also be aware of having seen it all before.

Apart from the occasional visual flourish (the aforementioned night sky, the ghostly flashbacks and Phango's smell-o-vision point of view), there is little to hold the attention. For a comedy about a zebra lacking in stripes, Khumba could have done with a few more good lines.

Pete Turner



EXPECTED  **5**
ACTUAL  **4**

DVD + BLU-RAY REVIEWS



HATCHET III

DVD & BD / Cert: 18 / Director: B.J. McDonnell / Screenplay: Adam Green / Starring: Danielle Harris, Kane Hodder, Zach Galligan, Caroline Williams / Release Date: March 31st

With the box office demise of death merchants Jason Voorhees and Freddy Krueger, writer/director Adam Green has certainly done slasher fans a favour with his creation of the *Hatchet* franchise. Now in his third outing, the deranged, deformed psycho mass murderer Victor Crowley (Hodder) shows no sign of slowing down, despite Green vacating the director's chair in favour of tyro helmsman B.J. McDonnell.

Yes, Crowley is back, despite being literally bisected vertically with a chainsaw as the film opens... or as the last one closed. (We pick up immediately where *Hatchet II* left off with Marybeth (Harris) performing some none too subtle power tool surgery on Crowley in self-defence.) In a twist that not many of the earlier '80s and '90s franchise slashers ventured near, Marybeth, as the lone survivor of the murderous

onslaught, is actually arrested on suspicion of the slaughter of all the victims of *Hatchet II*. We always wondered how those final survivors managed to explain everything. In a welcome return to genre films, the local sheriff is played by Zach Galligan who hardly seems to have aged since his *Gremlins/Waxworks* days.

However, we see that Victor Crowley is no easier a man to put down and keep down than his inspirational predecessor Jason Voorhees, and he's soon back stomping around in the backwaters and swamps of the Louisiana bayou. It's Amanda (Caroline Williams - familiar to slasher fans for her roles in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre II* and *Rob Zombie's Halloween II*) who holds the key to a solution to the problem of a killer who can't be killed.

Speaking as firm fans of the *Friday the 13th* films, it truly is great to see the imposing

and intimidating form of Kane Hodder back in murderous form, executing some of the nastiest "kills" to be seen in a horror film - including here a memorable penetrating punch to the stomach, grabbing the spine and yanking out the backbone and skull. Speaking of *Friday the 13th*, trivia lovers will no doubt be interested to learn that Derek Mears, who played the role of Jason in the 2009 reboot, has a substantial role in this as the SWAT team leader commanding the search and recovery team investigating the recent massacres (who unsurprisingly provide Crowley with some new victims). There's also a fan-pleasing role for genre favourite Sid Haig, and a "blink and you'll miss it" fleeting cameo for a character from the first *Hatchet* whose identity we won't reveal here. While making no real sense, it's a nice touch.

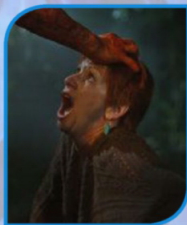
The *Hatchet* films have

succeeded by mixing chills and copious amounts of gore with well-written fast, slick and funny dialogue. Yes, the situations and the characters are indeed clichéd; *Hatchet* creator Adam Green, who has a non-speaking cameo early in the film, knows this, and rather than provide tired old scenarios we're all familiar with ad nauseum, Green has, so far created a trilogy that celebrates this subgenre while adding some self-deprecating humour. Effectively, we're not mocking the cliché, we're not laughing at the films and its improbable situations - we're laughing along with them, and enjoying more than a fair share of jolts along the way.

With the plot device now firmly established that Crowley is indestructible, there's no reason why there can't be a *Hatchet IV* and beyond, and as long as they're as much fun to watch as this one, featuring some laugh-out loud lines and strong characterisations, we're looking forward to seeing more of them. You really can't beat all-out escapist entertainment with a smirk on its face and a hatchet in its hand.

Robin Pierce

RATING ★★★★★★★ 9





BLACK WATER VAMPIRE

DVD / Cert: 15 / Director: Evan Tramel / Screenplay: Evan Tramel / Starring: Danielle Lozeau, Andrea Monier, Anthony Faneli, Bill Oberst, Jr / Release Date: March 24th

"The following footage was found a year later." Oh joy. Found footage features have come a long way since *Blair Witch* – some might say too far – but *Black Water Vampire* manages to not only go back to the Blair Witch well but it also breaks some unexpectedly new ground. Here, ladies and gentlemen, is the world's first

found footage vampire movie. It makes a refreshing change from haunted houses, churches and Costa Coffee [Is this quite right? – Ed] and is at least a sort of claim to fame for this otherwise derivative and largely unimaginative meander through a movie genre we're surely all utterly sick and tired of by now.

You know the score, A bunch of amateur movie-makers set off to explore a local mystery; across the last forty years a woman has been murdered every ten years (not the same woman, that'd be ridiculous) in the woods near Black Water. A handy weirdo (Oberst) has been arrested and is due to fry. But Danielle (Lozeau) isn't sure they've got the right man and decides to explore the woods with her chums to try to discover if rumours of vampires in the woods are true.

Inevitably, our heroes do what the heroes of found footage films do every time. They get lost, blunder about in the dark, they scream a lot and run around gasping but they always remember to film absolutely everything no matter how terrified they are. Needless to say, there is something nasty in the woods and, surprisingly, it is quite gruesome, if reminiscent of the cave-dwelling boogies of Neil Marshall's *The Descent*. If you're of a nervous disposition it might actually be quite scary in the right light...

To be fair, we've seen worse FF films than *Black Water*

Vampire. The vampire angle is a decent USP, the crisp, snowy locations have a pleasing unearthliness about them and the cinematography is a bit more accomplished than a throwaway movie of this type might normally deserve. Utterly stupid ending aside, *Black Water Vampire* isn't too shabby even if it's just the same old story but with a vampire instead of an invisible ghost.

Extras: None

Paul Mount

RATING +++++ S



THE MACHINE

DVD & BD / Cert: 15 / Director: Caradog W. James / Screenplay: Caradog W. James / Starring: Caity Lotz, Toby Stephens, Denis Lawson / Release Date: March 31st

The latest incarnation of Mary Shelley's classic horror, Frankenstein, arrives with a sci-fi twist and a thinly veiled message about the constant battle between pure science and the military-industrial complex.

Vincent (Stephens) is determined to help find a cure for his daughter whilst researching and testing ways to improve the life

experiences of war veterans who come home with limbs missing or sometimes even worse. The veterans are, for all intents and purposes, killed in the line of duty, such are their reduced abilities to adapt to the real world. As a result they are actually prisoners, aware that they are unlikely to ever see the light of day again.

Unhappy with the state of

play, Vincent nonetheless uses his skills to assist the MoD with their attempts to create a perfect soldier, taking the time to try and help his daughter escape her own locked-in world. Thanks to a computer programme that is almost able to think and respond like a human, it looks like there could be breakthroughs on both sides, but when Ava (Lotz), the AI expert who created it, is caught sniffing around where she shouldn't, their boss Thomson (Lawson) has her killed in what appears to be a terrorist attack.

Vincent decides to plough ahead and uses Ava as the avatar for their new product – The Machine. Able to think like a human, but with none of the flaws, it's the next leap forward in combat ready soldiers. Of course, as Skynet has proven in the past (or is it future?), self-aware technology is not always a good thing.

Although the overall synopsis is nothing new, there's a nice understated feel to this British production. Stephens is good as the father, trying to get his daughter back. Thomson is typically nasty as the man in charge, but it is Lotz

who steals the show, effortlessly switching from the savvy Ava to the almost childlike but potentially deadly Machine.

There is a whiff of Romero's *Day of the Dead* with the underground lab forming the key setting for the events as they unfold, but that just adds to the pleasantly low-budget feel. Smart, British sci-fi at its best.

Extras: None

JD Gillam

RATING +++++ A





PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE (1974)

BD / Cert: 15 / Director: Brian De Palma / Screenplay: Brian De Palma / Starring: William Finley, Paul Williams, Jessica Harper, Gerrit Graham / Release Date: Out Now

Winslow Leach (Finley), a talented but struggling singer-songwriter and composer, is conned into handing over the sheet music for his interpretation of Faust by all-powerful record company magnate Swan (Williams), who plans to use it for the grand opening of his new venue, the Paradise. When Leach seeks out Swan for recompense, the evil one has him beaten up, framed for dope-pushing, and sent to Sing Sing for his trouble.

Hearing that Swan-managed pop idols The Juicy Fruits are to release one of his songs, he breaks out and heads straight to the record factory to destroy the pressings, but gets caught in the vinyl press and is violently crushed.

Now hideously disfigured, Leach finds his way to the Paradise, beginning a reign of terror as Swan and his flavour-of-the-month acts prepare their opening extravaganza. However, this is put

on hold when he comes face to face with Swan, who offers him the chance to have the music recorded the way he wants it and performed by Phoenix (Harper, of *Suspiria*), a talented young singer whom Leach worships. But he should know better than to trust the sinister Swan, let alone sign a contract with him in his own blood...

So, a comic *Phantom of the Opera* for the groovy '70s then, with a bit of Faust thrown in, but this doesn't quite cover it. De Palma creates a damning satire of the music industry that is just as relevant today – where it seems more insidiously putrid and pointless than ever thanks to Simon Cowell's 'Next!' culture. Swan's Death Records label flits from pushing one manufactured band to another at the drop of a hat, with The Juicy Fruits and their immediate successors, The Beach Bums and The Undeads, all tellingly played by the same actors. It's not just the industry that comes under fire; the jaded audiences are depicted as equally callous, ecstatically excited by each new on-stage death that the Phantom brings about.

As a piece of filmmaking, it's a true phantasmagoria, with the enthusiastic young De Palma employing every trick in his grab-bag: spilt screens, montages, coloured filters, distorted lenses, you name it, many of which subsequently employed to devastating effect in his breakthrough feature, *Carrie*. The music is great too, the score being written by Williams, himself a massively successful songwriter who's heard his work performed by everyone from Elvis to Karen Carpenter. This work was nominated for an Oscar, but it's his portrayal of the satanic Swan that really sticks in the memory.

Pure insane, beautiful, '70s brilliance.

Extras: *Isolated Music & Effects Soundtrack / 50 minute Making Of Documentary / 50 minute Paul Williams interview by Guillermo Del Toro / Outtakes / Alternate takes / Trailers / Collector's Booklet*

Rob Talbot

RATING ★★★★★ 9



OLDBOY (2013)

DVD & BD / Cert: 18 / Director: Spike Lee / Screenplay: Various / Starring: Josh Brolin, Elizabeth Olson, Samuel L. Jackson / Release Date: Out Now

Stop us if you've heard this one before... a man, seemingly without rhyme or reason, is kidnapped and locked away in a spartan prison cell minus explanation, company or means to contact the outside world. Twenty years later, he is released, and sets about searching for answers. The crucial question he hasn't asked – why on Earth

would you try to remake *Oldboy*?

Volumes are spoken by the fact that no octopuses were harmed in the making of this feature. We weren't particularly desperate to see Josh Brolin wrap his jaws around a live, struggling octopus, but it does give away the fact that *Lee's Oldboy* is the compromised, toned down American retelling we

had assumed it would be. It's far from toothless (at times, it's more violent than the original movie) but lacks the punk ferocity of Chan-wook Park's film.

It starts well, with an extended prelude in which we are introduced to Brolin's unpleasant alcoholic Joe Doucett (aptly pronounced 'Douchette'). The twenty years (or minutes) we then spend with Joe in his captivity is when *Oldboy* is at its best. It's a damning indictment of the quality of the writing elsewhere that Joe's friendship with a family of mice is the most compelling, affecting relationship in the film. Similarly, seeing Doucett experience 9/11 from the confines of his cell has a certain unmatched resonance. And then, one day, Doucett is released...

If you've seen the peerless original, then there are few surprises to be found here. There are several nifty additions and technological updates (Joe's dad-like attempts to get to grips with his iPhone is particularly amusing) and Samuel L. Jackson is diverting in his role as a fashionable hotelier, making it a hard film to completely disregard.

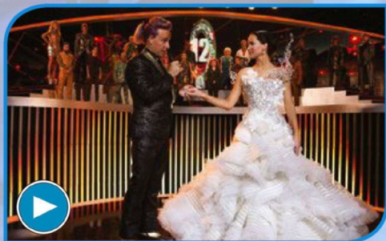
Lee's version of the hammer fight is well done, and there's a really good flashback sequence towards the end. Brolin may lack Min-sik Choi's mesmerising mania, but he's still a fine screen presence. If Elizabeth Olsen is underused as the love interest of the piece, then Sharlto Copley is overdone as its villain, giving a camp pantomime performance that feels at odds with the grubby realism the film aims for elsewhere. Lee tries to have his cake and eat it with the denouement, which attempts to be both faithful and uplifting at the same time. Neither works in its favour, resulting in an ending which will disappoint viewers who have seen the original and confuse those who haven't.

Ill-advised and tonally inconsistent as it may be, *Oldboy* isn't the outright failure we may have expected. It's a low point in his career, but at least Lee tried to *Do The Right Thing* with it...

Extras: TBC

Joel Harley

RATING ★★★★★ 7



THE HUNGER GAMES - CATCHING FIRE

DVD & BD / Cert: 12 / Director: Francis Lawrence / Screenplay: Simon Beaufoy, Michael Arndt / Starring: Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth / Release Date: Out Now

The Hunger Games return for a second course with *Catching Fire*, a sequel to 2012's insanely popular *Twilight*-for-intelligent-people, *Battle Royale*-for-dummies sci-fi thriller. While Gary Ross' *Hunger Games* adaptation was slick but flawed, thanks to its incomprehensible action sequences and predictable story,

Francis Lawrence's sequel is a vast improvement.

Smarter and simply better on almost every level, *Catching Fire* delves deeper into The Capitol, giving more insight over to Panem's struggle. Katniss Everdeen, joint winner of last year's *Hunger Games*, battles survivor's guilt, (presumably)

Post Traumatic Stress and the constant doe-eyes of unrequited lover Peeta Mellark, in addition to the looming evil of President Snow. It's a relief from her busy schedule when Snow announces that the next *Hunger Games* will be made up of victors from games past, including herself and Peeta.

Jennifer Lawrence and beau Josh Hutcherson remain impressive, but it's the increased adult presence which makes *Catching Fire* such an attractive prospect for grown-up audiences. Donald Sutherland is given much more to do as President Snow, while Stanley Tucci, Elizabeth Banks and Lenny Kravitz all reprise their respective roles. Woody Harrelson remains a highlight, while certain scenes with Banks and Kravitz are sure to raise a snuffle. In a poignant note, the late, great Philip Seymour Hoffman also appears as gamemaster Plutarch Heavensbee – real life tragedy creating a void that will be missed over the two remaining sequels. Of the youths, Sam Claflin stands out. DC and WB take note: you could do far worse for your live

action *Aquaman*. Kid knows how to rock a Trident.

The improvements made extend to the action and writing, both of which feel more grown-up and organic. Bloodless as it may be, there's a fluidity to the fight sequences reminiscent of the jump in quality between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*. It's still imperfect – one character's death throes are so fluffed that many might not even register it – but it's a vast improvement over what came before. Smart and sharp enough that non-readers of the book can still enjoy it, *Catching Fire* was one of 2013's best. Where *The Hunger Games* was enjoyable yet dull, this sequel leaves us starving for more.

With deleted scenes, audio commentaries and a making-of featurette, this Blu-ray release should satisfy fans' hunger until *Mockingjay – Part 1* comes along later this year. Delicious.

Extras: TBC

Joel Harley

RATING  8



UFO CHRONICLES - YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH

DVD / Cert: E / Director: Anthony Miles / Screenplay: Anthony Miles, Robert Miles / Starring: Sean David Morton / Release Date: Out Now

When Sean David Morton first pops up on your screen announcing that there is 'so little of your reality that is based on truth it's stunning', you can't help but sit and wait to see what he and what will presumably be other informants have to say. An hour later, you're not so sure. There are no other informants, there's not even any footage

or photos to back up Morton's claims. This release is just an hour and ten minutes of him talking. While this approach is unorthodox considering the format, it's not that which makes this release such a joke. That honour falls to Morton himself.

At first it all seems (given the open-mindedness you'd need to accept the subject matter) quite

credible. Morton claims he spent most of his childhood being surrounded by NASA astronauts (he even claims he has two of them as godfathers) who would regularly show him footage and photos of UFOs the world was never supposed to see. He goes on to talk about the people he has spoken to (as part of various documentaries) and the times he would spy on Area 51 and the ships he saw coming and going. Again, there is no footage or images to back this up.


It's when Morton goes on to explain his psychic powers that it all falls apart. That and the fact that, recorded in 2005, his future predictions are laughable. Being able to track the stock market and do the numbers on earthquakes doesn't make you Nostradamus (who he also heavily crabs from). Last year Morton was told to pay back \$11 million to people he defrauded in money scams linked to his 'prophetic abilities'. Nuff said, the guy's a joke and so is this DVD.

But wait a second, all is not lost. Buried in the Special Features is a little gem. UFOs

and ETs is compiled of two UK cable show episodes. The first (*Esoteria*) is grist for the mill, focusing on a man who claims to be plagued by UFOs that follow him (but nobody else can see) and another who talks honestly about the tiny alien rabbit cats that sat on his chest and ate his cancer. The second though is far more enthralling. In an episode of *On the Edge*, presenter Theo Chalmers talks to conspiracy theorist Marcus Allen about the Moon Landing. Wholly different from the other tosh on this release, the discussion is backed up by photo 'proof' and compelling arguments that certainly seem to point to some form of skulduggery by NASA. Why this wasn't used as a basis for the release I have no idea. A diamond in the rough, these 42 minutes almost – almost – makes the DVD worth watching.

Extras: See above

Grant Kempster

RATING  2



THE BORDERLANDS

DVD / Cert: 15 / Director: Elliott Goldner / Screenplay: Elliott Goldner / Starring: Gordon Kennedy, Robin Hill, Aidan McArdle / Release Date: April 7th

There's no phrase likely to drive terror into the hearts of the discerning film viewer more than "found footage". OK, maybe "directed by Uwe Boll" or "starring Adam Sandler", but it's up there. For those disenchanted with the genre, *The Borderlands* isn't going to change their minds. On paper it sounds like any number of risible movies we've seen over the years. With one big difference. It's bloody good.

The plot, which sees a Vatican team consisting of two priests and a technical expert sent to an English West Country village to investigate an alleged miracle at the local church, is hardly going to win any awards for originality. But it's not trying to. What it is trying to do is alternatively make you laugh and scare the shit out of you. And on both accounts it

succeeds admirably.

What sets the film apart from many of its ilk are a series of brilliantly executed scares and a clever, cliché-defying script by first time writer/director Elliott Goldner. It's also aided tremendously by a pair of terrific central performances from Gordon Kennedy and Robin Hill. The pair have a fun chemistry, and the semi-improvised dialogue from Hill (who co-wrote Ben Wheatley's *Down Terrace*) in particular provides much of the film's humour. As the team's technical expert, he's the sort of fast talking, witty character you alternately want to hang out with or punch in the face. Along with Kennedy's cynical priest, the odd couple feel a lot more real than many of the one dimensional characters we've come to expect in the genre.

The realistic approach extends to the found footage, which lends credibility to the potentially hokey premise. With the team required to document everything as part of their investigation, the technique makes it all the more disturbing when bad things inevitably start

to happen. It's no spoiler to say the supernatural goings on in the church are genuine, and director Goldner makes the most of his minuscule budget to provide some effective scares. You forget how powerful a door suddenly closing or a well-timed sound effect can be, and he delivers more creepy moments than many films with a hundred times his budget.

A couple of secondary characters never quite come to life, a revelation about one of the leads seems a little unnecessary, and the climax veers towards Blair Witch territory, but for the most part *The Borderlands* succeeds admirably. Deftly balancing humour and shocks, it's one of the best uses of found footage we've seen in a long time and one of the strongest British horrors of recent years. It also gives you the perfect excuse to never go in a church again.

Extras: None

Iain Robertson

RATING +++++ 9



ESCAPE PLAN

DVD & BD / Cert: 15 / Director: Mikael Hafstrom / Screenplay: Miles Chapman, Jason Keller / Starring: Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, 50 Cent / Release Date: Out Now

Sylvester Stallone lends Arnold Schwarzenegger his crap *Expendables* beard for *Escape Plan*, a hi-tech sci-fi action thriller that dumps the both of them in prison and lets their machismo do the rest of the work.

Escape Plan finally gives action movie fans the team-up they wanted, with Arnie and Stallone getting to spend plenty of time

together in the close proximity that governor Jim Caviezel's futuristic prison dictates. "You hit like a vegetarian," Arnie sneers, in the film's best line. But there's more to *Escape Plan* than punching. The geriatric action heroes team up to escape the inescapable, hindered by governor Caviezel and his chief warden Vinnie Jones. Handy that Stallone specialises in breaking

out of prisons and that between him and Schwarzenegger look as though they could beat the pulp out of Vinnie Jones without breaking a sweat. They certainly act the ex-footballer off the screen, with Arnie impressing in a role that finally gets him to use some of his native German. Caviezel and Sam Neill are there to provide the (slightly) more nuanced acting, while 50 Cent is categorically awful as computer wiz (!) Hush. We wish he would. Between Fiddy and Jones, Sly and Arnie are left looking like a pair of seasoned thespians.

It would have been nice to see a bigger beatdown between Stallone and the Governor – the extent of their much-publicised punch up is there in the trailer – but *Escape Plan* provides plenty of entertainment elsewhere. It's a solid, thoroughly enjoyable thriller that gives its stars plenty to do; a fun throwback with decent action, well-employed twists and good performances from everyone who isn't Vinnie Jones or 50 Cent. Even better, Ahnuld doesn't inform anyone of his comings or goings so much as once. There's

even a chopper which he (barely) manages to resist the urge to tell Sly to get to. "Have a lovely day... asshole" may not be up there with his best quips, but it brought a smile to this action fan's face. Old-fashioned without getting too bogged down in fan-pleasing references or lines from other movies, it's one of the old guard's better revival movies.

Fun, funny and entertainingly trashy, *Escape Plan* is an excellent bit of old-school escapism.

Extras: TBC

Joel Harley

RATING +++++ 7





THOR - THE DARK WORLD

DVD & BD / Cert: 12 / Director: Alan Taylor / Screenplay: C.Yost, C.Markus, Stephen McFeely / Starring: Chris Hemsworth, Tom Hiddleston / Release Date: Out Now

The Marvel movie-making machine ploughs further into Phase 2 of their battle plan with an action-packed sequel that just about hits all the required beats. *Thor: The Dark World* follows the dictates of Movie Follow-up Rules 101 by giving you more of everything: from Thor kicking ass to Thor being funny. It broadens the scope of the universe with the techno-Nibelungen production design mixing up Norse mythology and

science-fiction traditions into a striking melange.

The sight of mighty Thor (Hemsworth) getting some hammer time with Mjolnir makes the fans happy, for sure, but it is Tom Hiddleston's Loki who has emerged as the secret weapon of these films (as well as Joss Whedon's *Avengers Assemble*). Loki's reptilian menace is enriched with a poignant take on familial disgruntlement and entitlement. Hiddleston has created a boo-hiss

pantomime villain and provided the character with a sense of near-Shakespearean tragedy.

Thor's 'adopted' brother is also given a fresh coat of dramatic depth, too, by virtue of what could be the classic redemption arc. Loki does have amends to make, after all. There was the nefarious scheme to seize the throne of Asgard, kill his brother, destroy Earth, reduce NYC to dust and subjugate the entire human race! As Malekith (Eccleston) and his mecha-pixies (sorry, dark elves) threaten to destroy the universe with a cosmic weapon/ force known as the Aether, Thor must learn to put his trust in Loki if they are to break out of Asgard and save the day. It's a big ask...

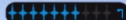
The HD quality imagery and sound mixing on Blu-ray is stupendous. The animated menu is good-looking too – capturing faces from the film in a rich, pop art style. The bonus material, however, is solid stuff. A cast and crew commentary track is informative and open about such matters as reshoots and test screenings and the half-hour doc on Thor and Loki

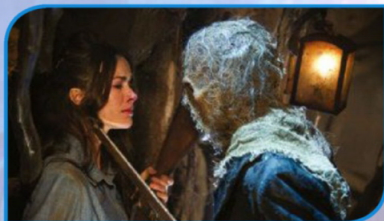
dives into their sibling rivalry. The 'gag reel' is missing a vital component: humour. The best of the seven Deleted/Extended Scenes is Loki annoying Thor by transforming into various people (including Captain America). In the movie, Chris Evans made a brief appearance. Here, we get to see Hiddleston's less buff frame in the Star-Spangled Man's uniform. Fans will get a kick out of it.

The Marvel One-Shot short, *All Hail the King*, directed and written by Iron Man 3 co-scribe Drew Pearce, is the best of the bunch. Ben Kingsley returns as The Mandarin fraudster Trevor Slattery, now living in a maximum security prison and living off the scraps of celebrity. Kingsley is, once more with feeling, on top form. A featurette on Brian Tyler's score and a preview of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* round things off nicely.

Extras: See above

Martyn Conterio

RATING 



THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT 2 - GHOSTS OF GEORGIA

DVD & BD / Cert: 15 / Director: Tom Elkins / Screenplay: David Coggeshall / Starring: Chad Michael Murray, Abigail Spencer, Katee Sackhoff / Release Date: Out Now

First up, don't go in to *Ghosts of Georgia* expecting a direct sequel to 2009's *The Haunting in Connecticut*. Both this movie and the '09 film were developed from a trilogy of *The Haunting in...* documentaries, but that's where the immediate association ends. *Ghosts of Georgia* focuses on a family that move to an apparent dream house in, if you hadn't already guessed, Georgia. Andy

(Murray) and Lisa (Spencer), along with daughter Heidi (Lind) and Lisa's sister Joyce (Sackhoff) house themselves up in the lavish home and its idyllic charm. Of course, all is not as idyllic as it first appears.

It's established early on that Lisa has an ability to see spirits, a power that she is taking medication to restrict. Similarly, her young daughter and sister have the same gift, which Joyce

encourages the young Heidi to embrace. As ever, with great power comes great responsibility, and these viewers of all things spooky soon realise that the property and land they call home is stalked by the menacing visage of the previous owner and a slew of other spirits. The reasoning for this? In years gone by, the land housed an underground railroad that would allow slaves to escape to freedom during the Civil War. Through flashbacks, we find out that this process was overseen by a chap called the Station Master; an honourable taxidermy enthusiast. Upon being discovered as assisting in the break-out of slaves, the poor Station Master was brutally butchered and stuffed. Oh, the irony...

Ghosts of Georgia is a steady movie, although it often feels like it has a checklist of horror clichés to cross off. Squeaky old house with a troubled past? Creepy old man? A gaggle of twists and turns? All accounted for. Still, don't be fooled by this, for *Ghosts of Georgia* does offer several unique and interesting plot points, and there are a couple

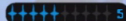
of great performances tying the piece together.

Central to the story is young Heidi. Emily Alyn Lind really does hold the film together in a way not seen very often from someone of such a young age. Similarly, Chad Michael Murray does well as Andy, largely down to some great moments shared with Lind's Heidi, although he does seem to spend far too much of the film putting in a far-too-tight vest.

Surprisingly good, innovative effects add to *Ghosts of Georgia*'s charm but the movie is let down by some poor editing and dizzily quick cuts from Tom Elkins. The story is so-so but a few strong performances and some unique SFX work save *Ghosts of Georgia* from being pure fodder. A shame director Elkins seems to take pleasure in butchering his own movie, resulting in an effort that feels nothing more than 'meh.'

Extras: None

Andrew Pollard

RATING 



THE TERRONAUTS (1967)

DVD / Cert: PG / Director: Montgomery Tully / Screenplay: John Brunner, Murray Leinster / Starring: Simon Oates, Zena Marshall, Charles Hawtrey / Release Date: Out Now

You probably know Amicus as the people who gave us those portmanteau horrors of the '60s/'70s or the Peter Cushing Doctor Who movies. However, Who wasn't their only excursion into sci-fi. *The Terronnauts* (1967) is a bona fide piece of cult British sci-fi with a screenplay by John Brunner and fondly remembered by people with fuzzy recollections. Network specialise in turning up these

oddities and they haven't let us down with this one.

It starts off as a promising, if low-budget story of scientists working on Project Star Talk, a sort of low-rent British SETI. The jargon's good (although we're not vouching for its authenticity) and they've even got Zena Marshall as their secretary - so after ten minutes you'd be forgiven for thinking you're watching a glammed-up

version of a Quatermass story. And then Charles Hawtrey walks in. No, really; he walks right in and starts auditing their accounts. While you're still reeling from that shocker he's followed by Patricia Hayes with a tea urn smoking a fag. So the building then being picked up by a spaceship that transports them all to an alien base at the edge of the solar system is something of an anti-climax. Blimey, who's going to review this one? (You are - Ed) Oh, right.

The Terronnauts is very nearly a complete disaster. Hawtrey and Hayes are there purely for laughs but it would help if they'd been given some funny lines (although Hayes does get a zinger right at the end). And while it is terribly unsporting to mention special effects in low-budget '60s Brit-flicks, it would help if they were capable of assisting the story. We honestly thought that was a sort of small hovering robot thing until it appeared over the radio telescope like something out of Michael Bentine's *Potty Time*. [Michael who's what? - Ed] Hard to believe 2001: A

Space Odyssey was being filmed down the road at the time. But for all that, there's some interesting bits in here: the ancient dead alien at the base (very *Who*); a scientist's childhood memories of dreams in an alien landscape; the bathing caps with bits stuck to them to read the base's memory cubes. OK, not the bathing caps then (although admirable straight faces all round). And certainly not the Least Exciting Space Battle in the History of Cinema at the climax.

But we can't really think of anything similar, so if you're the curious sort you might want to give this a try; but only if you're very, very curious. Or maybe you think Patricia Hayes stepping off a teleoperation pad and saying "I feel like I've been squirted through space like a BBC broadcast" is worth the price of admission. Oh, now you're tempted.

Extras: Original theatrical version / Trailer / Gallery

John Knott

RATING +++ 3



IN FEAR

DVD & BD / Cert: 15 / Director: Jeremy Lovering / Screenplay: Jeremy Lovering / Starring: Alice Englert, Iain De Caestecker, Allen Leech / Release Date: Out Now

A young couple, on the way to a music festival, hop into a car for a drive around the British countryside. After getting on the wrong side of the locals in a rural pub, the pair find themselves lost in a maze of country roads, bickering with one another and, eventually, in fear for their very lives. Well, they do say that the first holiday together can make or

break a couple.

With a core cast of three kids and a car, *In Fear* has a very limited canvas with which to present its wares. What didn't go so well for the atrocious *Five Across the Eyes* played better in the creepy *Wind Chill*; the differences between the two revealing how little margin for error there is on such a small-scale piece.

Thankfully, we're more in the territory of the latter here, with Iain De Caestecker continuing to impress as young Tom. He was great in the underrated and under-watched *The Fades*, and displays a similar level of talent here. Alice Englert is good as Lucy, especially considering that her role here doesn't give her much more to do than scream and be confused. To be fair, she has plenty to be confused by, with car doors slamming, shadows leering from the bushes and car keys mysteriously going missing. Tom's no help either, repeatedly taking his frustrations out on the poor girl.

The first half is strong; tense, atmospheric and remarkably creepy, it sets forth a promising premise for a homegrown low-budget British horror. Director Jeremy Lovering handles the pacing and mounting terror well, crafting an experience that could have rivalled *Paranormal Activity* or *The Blair Witch Project*, if done right. Alas, as soon as the nature of the threat is revealed, all that tension and mystery evaporates, replaced by a

villain who isn't remotely scary. It remains watchable and intelligent throughout, but struggles to recapture its earlier sense of urgency and terror.

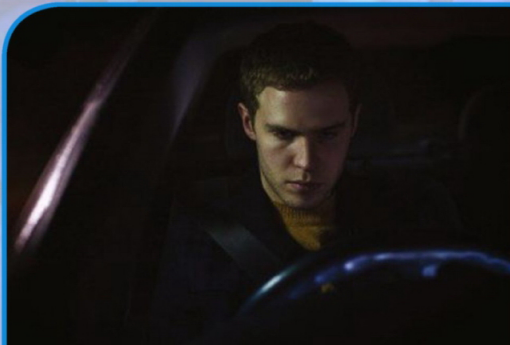
With *In Fear*, an old adage is once again proved - sometimes the scariest things are best left unseen.

Extras: Commentary with Lovering, Englert, De Caestecker and Leech / Behind The Scenes Documentary / Stills Gallery / Music from and inspired by *In Fear* by Roly Porter / Trailer

Joel Harley

RATING +++++ 7





INTERVIEW - IAIN DE CAESTECKER

STARBURST got the opportunity to chat with rising star **Iain De Caestecker** about his new movie **IN FEAR**, not to mention a certain TV show by the name of **AGENTS OF S.H.I.E.L.D.** in which he plays Agent Leo Fitz...

Starburst: For those that haven't read our review on page 86, how would you summarise, *In Fear*?

Iain De Caestecker: It's a story kind of set around Tom [De Caestecker] and Lucy [Englet], who are this young couple who've gone away to Ireland for a trip and they're in the very early stage of their relationship. They don't actually know each other that well and they're kind of just good friends at this point, then Tom decides to surprise her and book a hotel for a night, which is kind of presumptuous. As they're travelling through these country roads and it's getting darker and darker - it's like a maze - and things start to happen to them. As things start to happen, they start to begin questioning each other and what's going on. Things become more and more terrifying and they become more and more lost. It's a psychological thriller.

Is it set in actual real-time?

Actually, yeah. It's all kind of set over one day and one night, so it's pretty much set in real-time.

How did you end up involved in the project?

I met Jeremy [Lovering, the director] for a couple of meetings. Alice was in Australia, so I Skyped with her, and we did an audition over Skype. After that, we just

went into rehearsals and started shooting. With two weeks of rehearsals, we did a five or six week shoot.

Audition over Skype? How was that?

I wouldn't advise it - there was a bit of a time-lapse. The good thing was, I could tell that this was going to be a really cool experience, doing a movie with her... but

it's definitely not the best way to conduct an audition.

In Fear has been described as a home invasion-type movie, but set in a car. What movies would you compare it to in terms of the tone and feel?

It's kind of got elements of something like *Funny Games*, and it's definitely got a British, European feel to it. It's also very natural, so I suppose it's got an element of a Ken Loach film, where we tried to make it feel as real as possible. We wanted it to be like that. We didn't want it to be like one of those movies where you're saying, "Why didn't you do that? Why didn't you just run out of the house?" We wanted to make sure that these people were actually stuck in the situation, that there was nothing that they could do. That was an important feature of it.

Along with *The Fades*, in terms of darker, more sinister projects, this is one of your first. Is the horror and thriller route something you're looking to get involved in a bit more?

I don't like to think too much of genre or medium. It's just about if it's a character that I really get or an important story. Also, I'm not at the stage where I can just pick and choose. It's also about working with directors and other actors. It wasn't really a foresight to work in horror, but it is something that I've always been really interested in.

And how was the shoot for *In Fear*?

It was quite emotionally taxing, especially at the latter stage. We filmed it chronologically, so we were coming in every day and starting off where we left off, and often that was in a pretty dark place or an intense place. Aside from that, because of the nature of the way we did it - we





didn't really have a script – I didn't give myself as much of a hard time about going over scripts at night. I could kind of just relax at night, which was the best thing; just clear my head at night, leave it behind, then come in the next day with energy. Also, the people, Jeremy, Alice, Allen, Ireland... we had the most fun. Everyone got on really well, which is one of the great things to come from that as well.

You've been making quite a name for yourself with Marvel's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* How great an experience is it to be involved in that Marvel world?

It's really cool! It's a really cool thing. It's kind of strange at the same time, and there's a part of it that is daunting as it is such an amazing world that's created around them. It's always an incredibly exciting thing – we still get excited about things on set all the time, when we find out new things or some new gadget for us to use. It's really nice, and everyone's been so welcoming as well, giving it a family atmosphere.

One of the keys to the show is your relationship with Elizabeth Henstridge's Agent Simmons. How natural was that?

We're all a really close group and we're all coming into this at the same point, level-headed. And Clark [Gregg, *Agent Coulson*] is kind of the leader of the show, so he sets the tone for the atmosphere on set. It's professional but we also have a lot of fun. I suppose with Fitz and Simmons, they did come in together so they're very close; kind of like brother and sister. We get on really well, but the writers and producers have also done a really great job.

Is there anything particularly insightful you can give us on what may be

happening with Fitz in the future or is that all a bit hush-hush?

I couldn't really say. We find out from week-to-week, so we're not that much further ahead. The cool thing about it is, with this season, is Fitz and his courage, coming out there a bit more, putting himself in situations where he doesn't feel comfortable. So that's been really interesting.

Were you much of a comic book fan as a kid?

Definitely. My brother was a bit more than I was, but I was definitely into them. I now read a lot of comics and I really get into them; they're so amazing. There's some amazing stories out there, really engrossing. And now it's part of your job.

Do you ever see the characters from *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* progressing to the big screen at all?

I have no idea. We would probably find that out the same time as you. Right now, we're so busy with the show that it really does take over. It's a very long shoot. It kind of becomes your whole life. But yeah, we're definitely within the Marvel Universe, which means anything is possible with that kind of thing. It all connects together.

Other than *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, what else is lined up for you right now?

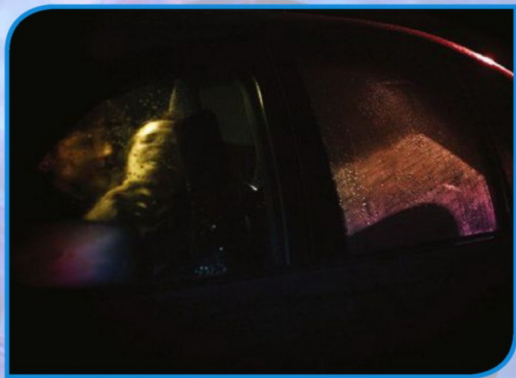
I try not to think too far ahead. We still have a few more episodes to shoot of *S.H.I.E.L.D.*, and then I'll see what happens after that. We still don't know whether we're doing Season 2 or not, and we should find that out soon, so I'm looking forward to that.

In terms of projects and genres, is there anything out there that you've not touched upon but would like to give a go?

I dunno, actually. I like being surprised by things. I also don't have the luxury to be too choosy – I still have to audition for things that I really want to do. I suppose, I've always had a list in my head of people that I'd want to work with, and some of those I've got to work with. I just want to hopefully be a part of things that I would like to see personally and work with people who are passionate about it, talented and inspiring to be around.

Andrew Pollard

IN FEAR is out now on DVD/Blu-ray and is reviewed on page 86.



★★★★★
-The Guardian

★★★★★
-Metro

★★★★★
-The Daily Record

★★★★★
-The Daily Mirror

★★★★★
-Empire

★★★★★
-Radio Times

★★★★★
-The Times

★★★★★
-Sci-Fi Now

★★★★★
-The Skinny

★★★★★
-Hervorelli

★★★★★
-Ficks and the City

★★★★★
-The Telegraph

★★★★★
-New Empires

★★★★★
-Cine-Vue

★★★★★
-The List

★★★★★
-The Observer

★★★★★
-Evening Standard

★★★★★
-Daily Express

★★★★★
-Total Film

★★★★★
-Time Out

★★★★★
-Little White Lies

★★★★★
-The Financial Times

★★★★★
-Mail on Sunday

★★★★★
-The Independent

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-Total Film

"An enduring masterpiece"

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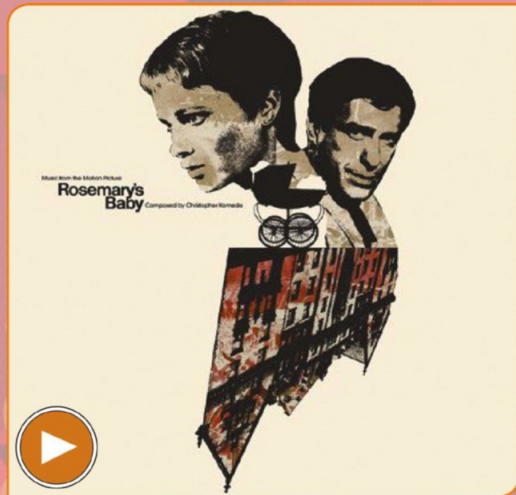
E!K!

The Masters of Cinema Series



[original soundtracks]

the Starburst
guide to the latest
Soundtracks
by Nick Spacke



score will feature every cue from the film, as well as liner notes from Harrison and director George Romero. It's a single LP release, with artwork by Ghoulish Gary Pullin, who also did the cover of the label's debut release, **Re-Animator**. Additionally, the label secured the rights to '80s killer-robot flick **Chopping Mall**, but no further details have been released.

One Way Static comes correct with their second release, featuring all of the music used in Wes Craven's **The Hills Have Eyes**. It sounds great, and what's fantastic about this release is that the tapes have been left mostly intact, in that you can hear composer Don Peake count off before pieces start. It lends the recordings a bit of context and, almost more importantly, given the brevity of some tracks, delineates when one bit ends and another begins. It comes in a gorgeous glossy tip-on gatefold sleeve, with the album title in gold foil on the cover. It looks like One Way Static is on their way to a design aesthetic, as well. The cover features the same font design as their release of **The Last House on the Left**, as well as an interesting production still, as opposed to the movie poster or custom art. It's a cool way of operating, if that's the direction in which they're headed.

Death Waltz Records' Record Store Day releases were leaked, so the label officially acknowledged what's coming out. They're all doozies: Nicola Piovani's **Il Profumo Della Signora In Nero**, Nico Fidenco's **Emanuelle Perche' Violenza Alle Donne?**, Clint Mansell's **In the Wall**, and Walter Rizzati's **1990: Guerrieri Del Bronx** (aka **The Bronx Warriors**). The first three were all surprises, while the last

Much in the way that Moffat and Gatiss played with the expected in **Sherlock**'s most recent episodes, David Arnold and Michael Price's soundtrack for the show's third series feels as fun as the first two installments did. Hearing **#SherlockLives** and the way it interpolates elements of all the series' recurring themes such as **The Chase** and **The Game is On** raises hairs on the back of one's neck. **Stag Night** is as close as anyone should ever get to a dubstep remix of **The Game is On**, while **Waltz for John and Mary** ought to make you cry, unless you're some kind of super-stoic who never feels emotion. Strangely, another track which works wonderfully in context - **How It Was Done** - sounds remarkably generic and uninspired when heard separately. It's available now on compact disc and digital download from Silva Screen.

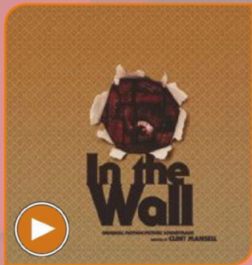
Essentially containing all of the elements on La-La-Land's 2012 compact disc reissue,

but without the redundancy of doubling several tracks, Waxwork Records has officially released the first vinyl version of the complete film score to Roman Polanski's **Rosemary's Baby**. It sounds amazing. Given the way the soundtrack repeatedly transitions between quietly uncomfortable mood music and upbeat jazz, getting the balance on this release was imperative. It's available in three versions - 180-gram crystal clear, black and burgandy haze, or 200-gram double-sided blue and red. The double-sided vinyl, we're told, is a first, in that one side of the record is blue and the other red. It's an amazing technological achievement, but the winner for sheer malevolence is the black and burgundy haze, which looks as if evil is bubbling up on your turntable.

If you're wanting to get excited for the next releases from Waxwork, Kevin Dredge confirmed via Twitter that their upcoming release of John Harrison's **Creepshow**



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had been teased in the label's promo image released to social media earlier in the year. The Piovanni and Fidenco releases will come in a shrink-wrapped, embossed and debossed Death Waltz Recording Company exclusive Record Store Day sleeve with obi strip, and featuring a 36 x 36 poster and a double sided 12 x 12 art print by We Buy Your Kids, while the Rizzati score comes with a print and cover art by Jeremy Wheeler. **In the Wall** features a Jay Shaw designed sleeve. All are on 180 gram vinyl, with the United States and Canada featuring one variant, and the United Kingdom, Europe, and the rest of the world receiving another.

As if that wasn't enough, Spencer Hickman and company have upped the ante by randomly inserting within the records "a Willy Wonka style golden ticket giveaway." There are three tiers of prizes, each one more amazing than the last. Firstly, there are ten bronze tickets, which allows the winner to pick three releases of their choice from Death Waltz's currently in-print catalog. Next will be five silver tickets for every release in the fourth volume of the Death Waltz subscription series (six releases in total). Finally, there will be one golden ticket that will give the holder "a Death Waltz foil printed box set to hold test pressings of every release for the next 12 months." May the odds be ever in your favour.

Speaking of Record Store Day, One Way State will release a picture disc version of their **The Last House on the Left** score, limited to 1000 copies.

Jesper Kyd's score for the first season of **Metal Hurlant Chronicles** is exceptionally diverse, which serves the purpose of the show's anthology nature. At times ethereal and sparse (*Alien Encounter*), at others bombastic (*The Tournament*), the entirety of this compilation is a bit difficult to put one's finger on. However, Kyd's work here has an underlying hint of unease and weirdness - off-kilter noises and pitch-shifted sounds give the listener the feeling that something's not quite right, especially on the calliope of *Stanley*. It pairs nicely with and contrasts well the bombastic aspects that are **Metal Hurlant Chronicles'**

other dominant aspect, reminiscent of Brad Fiedel's **Terminator 2** score. It's out now from *Something Else Music Works*, and available on iTunes, as well.

There's a brand-new digital label, Rotary Tower, dedicated to replicating the library scores put out by the likes of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Ran by James Dyer, the "spirit behind Rotary Tower is library music, but the aim is to release music that works with or without pictures and - unlike production music - make it available to everyone from our website."

Their first release - **Giallos Flame's Archivio Giallo Volume One** - is now available for digital download. Mr. Giallo (better known as Ron Graham) works with some crazy analogue synths to create tracks that pay homage to the likes of John Carpenter (*Carpenter's Groove* being a dead giveaway). "I love analogue, nothing like it," says Graham. "Sometimes it's just a mood, I get a feeling for the main vibe: dark, funky, et cetera. Other times, if I am watching a classic film and some real tasty tunes start playing, that inspires me to do a take on that type of groove. Initially, it was artists though, people like Goblin, De Angelis brothers, Fabio Frizzi, et al."

Rotary Tower's next release is from the duo Ganzfeld, entitled **Temas Spatiale Volume One**, and it seems like it's a 180-degree turn from the Giallos Flame, as

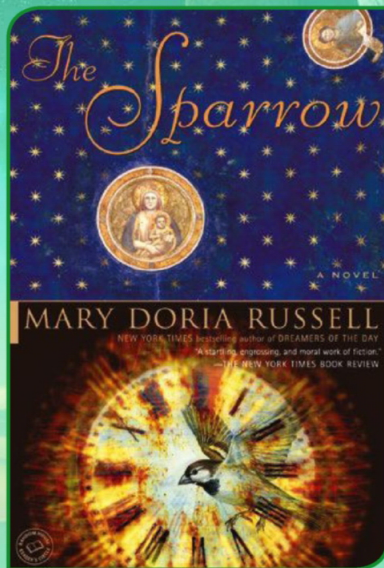
it's very spacy. However, label head Dyer sees it as a natural second release: "It's a definite diversion but not a complete u-turn. There's more room in Ganzfeld's music but I think they share something cinematic in common. I've worked with Tom from Ganzfeld on and off over the past 16 years. He produced music for a label I used to manage called DC Recordings and we produced some stuff together for Fat Cat records."

As a very last minute addition to this month's OST, there appears to be a brand-new label based out of Rochester, New York, in the United States. It's called **Strange Disc Records**, and their first release will be the never-released complete score to the Troma movie **Surf Nazis Must Die** by Jon McCallum on vinyl LP. The LP will be housed in a gatefold, tip-on sleeve and comes on black vinyl with 200 randomly-inserted copies on "Blood In The Water" coloured vinyl. There will be liner notes by director Peter George, producer Bob Tinelle, and editor Craig Colton. According to Strange Disc's Cameron Dean, "the soundtrack to **Surf Nazis Must Die** was intended to have a CD release shortly after the film was released. However, for one reason or another, the masters sat on the four track recorder for over 25 years. Strange Disc worked tirelessly with Jon McCallum and director Peter George for many months to make this release a reality and we are so happy that it's finally here."



BOOK WORMHOLE

a monthly pick
of Genre Fiction
by Kate Fathers



As regular Starburst readers will know, I spend a lot of time thinking about the differences between genre fiction and so-called "literary" fiction. Of course, there's the obvious: literary fiction is about realism, often set in the time period the author lives in and concerning plausible events, while genre fiction can be set anywhere and anywhere and star any species of protagonist. But there are also subtler differences which betray the prejudice many have towards genre fiction. To them,

while genre fiction can be about anything it is also shallow, unable to birth well-rounded characters or to say anything meaningful about society or the human condition. To put it mildly, I disagree.

The Sparrow is labelled "fiction". I'm going to tell you why it's so much more than that.

It's Rome, 2060, and Jesuit priest Emilio Sandoz has just returned from the first mission to the planet Rakhat. Of his team of eight, he is the only survivor. What follows is the painful story

of the mission, pulled from him as he recovers, and the struggle he has not only with what happened, but also with his wavering faith in God.

This is a beautiful book, both in subject and in execution. Russell's prose is instantly engaging, poetic but easy to read, and the back-and-forth between 2060 and the times surrounding the mission push you to keep reading long after you probably should have gone to bed. It is a unique first contact story, as it's not about a violent invasion of Earth or the more advanced aliens gracing humanity with their presence, but instead fashioned like the rest of human exploration. The mission is very much modeled after past human exploration, and as four of the mission members are Jesuits it fiercely recalls Jesuit missions to non-Christian countries. All of the pitfalls and tragedy are due, not to maliciousness, but to language and cultural barriers and the misunderstanding of foreign terrain. Like the introduction of diseases like smallpox to the Americas, Sandoz and his friends also inadvertently impact their alien environment, which leads to conflict. This roots the story, making it more relatable (even if it's from a historical perspective) and consequently more affecting.

At the heart, however, this is a character piece. The characters are fully realised: smart and brave and infuriating; damaged and funny and beautiful; and they drive the plot just as much as the plot affects and directs them. Much of the book is wrapped up in Sandoz, in his present in Italy recovering from the mission and in various points of his past. Through him we meet the other members of the mission, all from different walks of life—even the priests! The presence of religion through the Jesuits is also wonderfully used, but not

at all propagandist. The Jesuits are happy to talk God, but never force their faith on their friends, and the conversations about the presence of God within the universe and the depth of God's involvement in universal life are fascinating. Sandoz's personal story is wrapped up in his faith, in his struggle with it even before he returns to Earth, and it's both beautiful and heart-breaking to read.

Perhaps this is why Ballantine Books is so quick to call *The Sparrow* "fiction". As I said earlier, many believe that genre fiction is shallow—all flashy battles and no substantial characters—so when confronted with genre that has the "literary" attribute of character or theological exploration, they will happily wave away its genre affiliations. The author is elevating the genre, they probably say. But what is genre if not a discussion of humanity? Sci-fi is not only about space travel or time travel or mad men in blue boxes, it's about the things we are capable of and the places we can go; about our place in the universe and how we can't forget about love and family and friendship, even in the deep dark of outer space. If anything genre fiction throws a sharper light on what makes humanity so complex, so wonderful and terrible in frightening turns, and that should be celebrated. *The Sparrow*, I'm afraid, is science fiction that delves into the human soul, and there is something glorious about that.

A sequel to *The Sparrow* was released in 1998 called *Children of God*, continuing Sandoz's journey of recovery and the story of Rakhat. I loved this book more than I have room to say, and if you like good sci-fi I know you'll love it too. I can't say this enough: you better read this book.



GRIMM - THE CHOPPING BLOCK

Author: John Passarella
 Publisher: Titan
 Release Date: Out Now

The *Grimm* series of tie-in novels continues with *The Chopping Block*, a book different to its predecessor *The Icy Touch*, but no less effective. Anyone who's seen an episode of *Grimm* will know what to expect, and *The Chopping Block* sticks to that recipe: a strange murder case for Detectives Burkhardt and Griffin, plenty of twists and turns, the revelation that Wesen are involved, help from Monroe, followed by jeopardy, conflict, and the eventual solving of the case.

It's a formula, for sure, but one that's tried and tested; here, it's found to be reliable, making this book read like a darker and grittier version of what's seen on screen. Novels allow us to get into the heads of characters, whether hero or villain, but here the author also pushes us into the mind of the victims; one scene where a man is trying to escape is utterly unnerving, as the reader feels his fear and the palpable tension that goes with it. Any writer wanting to evoke atmosphere and downright terror would do well to read this particular chapter, a superlative piece of horror writing.

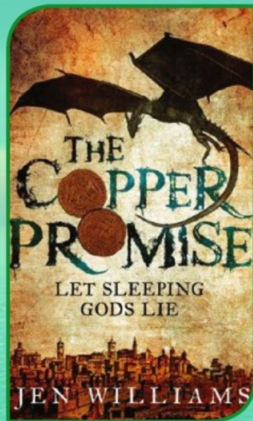
It's not a one-off, either. The quality continues throughout the book. It's a tight, taut and tense thriller – Nick

and Hank working on this case alone, rather than trying to show us as much of the *Grimm* universe as possible. It's assumed that the reader knows the background of the series, meaning any explanations are short and sweet, allowing the plot to take centre stage. Yet, as in the TV series, any new characters that turn up are instantly suspect, although there is a certain fun in guessing if any of them is a red herring.

That's a minor quibble; author John Passarella has written an exciting, dramatic and at times unsettling book, one that sticks to the format of its source material, yet uses it to craft a well-told tale that would be too dark for TV, the words playing in the mind of the reader, allowing the imagination free reign. It's a novel that's incredibly difficult to put down and, while not as grand in scale as the previous *Grimm* novel, slots nicely into the series (we're even given a 'historian's note' to tell us where), whetting the appetite for more, whether it be on page or screen.

Alister Davison

RATING



THE COPPER PROMISE

Author: Jen Williams
 Publisher: Headline
 Release Date: Out Now

The publishing industry, much like any media outlet, is prone to jumping on a bandwagon filled with new trends. At the time of writing, the recent surge of interest in the already very influential *Game of Thrones* novels has led to a glut of dark, gritty tomes in which everybody has a headache and where all the best characters get killed just as they get interesting. Luckily for those of us looking for something different, *The Copper Promise* bucks this trend by being a good old-fashioned fantasy adventure romp.

Two adventurers, a disgraced knight and a canny thief, are hired by a down-on-his-luck lord to enter the Citadel, a place that apparently holds unimaginable wealth and power but also has a firm reputation for being certain death. What the party discovers in that ancient ruin has far-reaching consequences for the world and much of the novel deals with cleaning up the mess caused by this incautious trio. It's a clever blend of fantasy pulp, balanced world building and sharp wit. Do you remember those spin-off fantasy novels of the eighties that had huge ideas, neat concepts for characters and never quite hit the mark? *The Copper Promise* is much like those odd little books, but in this case it hits the reader directly in their fantasy-loving heart and drags them into a rich fantasy world.

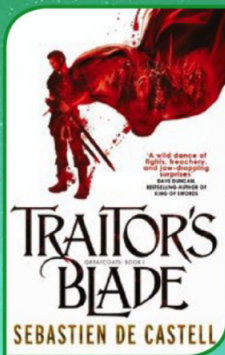
It is rather a thick book, but then that's exactly what we've come to expect from

fantasy novels; the sort of paperback that could realistically be used as a doorstop or in order to stun a burglar. *The Copper Promise* was originally released as four separate novellas and this really is to its advantage - the serialised nature of the story gives the work a naturalistic flow and provides a handy stopping off point for those of us who don't have the time to read a book in one sitting.

Jen Williams has a highly addictive storytelling style. This means that it's very hard to stop reading and when you aren't reading it, you're trying to work out when you can get your next fix. This is because she writes each character in an honest and entertaining way and pulls no punches; she's not afraid to have a main character who is utterly unlikeable or another protagonist who is a danger to all around them. Between Sir Sebastian, Lord Frith and the Copper Cat we have an adventurous party that we should find dull and irksome, but instead we love them for their flaws as much as their exploits. *The Copper Promise* is near-perfect fantasy adventure fun and a breath of fresh air in a genre choking on its own grittiness. Read it and remind yourself what made you fall in love with fantasy books.

Ed Fortune

RATING



TRAITOR'S BLADE

Author: Sebastien de Castell
Publisher: Jo Fletcher Books
Release Date: Out Now

The debut novel from Sebastien de Castell tells the story of the Greatcoats, who were once paragons of justice travelling the country upholding the King's Law, only to be disbanded when the power-hungry Dukes rose up against their monarch. Now little more than glorified mercenaries and branded

as traitors by anyone who speaks of them, Greatcoats Falcio, Kest and Brasti do what they can to maintain notions of honour in a nation quickly descending into despair and hopelessness.

Heavily inspired by *The Three Musketeers*, although thankfully not to the extent that the central trio are mere expies, *Traitor's Blade* takes place in a fantasy world roughly analogous to the late Middle Ages augmented with a corrupt version of feudalism. Like most initial instalments of fantasy cycles, the book is structured as much to give an introduction to the dynamics of the setting as to tell an actual story. While the former is a rousing success, the same cannot be said for the latter. When the plot is deconstructed, it becomes apparent that far too much has been left to fate, for without several chance encounters much of the story simply would not have occurred. The hazily alluded to quest the three Greatcoats are embarked upon is trying to divine the locations of the King's hidden chariots ("jewels") that will somehow be the country's salvation, but about which he neglected to impart any details before his death. You'll figure out what they are long before the protagonists, making their continued cluelessness to the full significance of the situation a little frustrating.

Perhaps we're used to a little more moral ambiguity these days, but you'd think it would be enough that the Dukes and Duchesses are merely arrogant and murderous 16ers without also being sadistic sociopaths whose idea of fun is watching a little girl try to avoid being trampled by a rabid horse. Falcio's insistence on acting as though the chivalrous ideals he once upheld still apply to the decaying society unequivocally mark him as the hero,

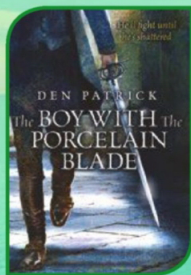
but almost everyone else's view of him as an amoral traitor seems to serve only to lazily emphasise the point by being wrong.

One thing that makes the book truly stand out is its combat sequences. De Castell's knowledge of swordfighting is clearly extensive, with the numerous duels described as though they were dances rather than fights. Choreographic terminology is employed to better specify the intricacies of the movements, imbuing them with an elegance that sets them apart from the violent melees seen in the works of authors like Joe Abercrombie or David Gemmell. Unfortunately, his knowledge of other forms of combat seems a little lacking, as anything without swashbuckling interplay is either described in the broadest terms or takes place in a haze of berserk fury. To give an idea of the differing detail, whereas duels are lovingly detailed over several pages, the climactic free-for-all battle that effectively decides the fate of the nation's people and defeat or victory for heroes and villains alike is begun and completed in the space of a couple of vague paragraphs.

Overall, *Traitor's Blade* is a flawed but engaging swashbuckling romp driven by elaborate swordplay and Aaron Sorkin-esque speechifying. Throughout its meandering structure there are the seeds of something great; tighter and less generic and episodic plotting, along with less focus on unforeshadowed and ultimately meaningless revelations, would have done it wonders.

Andrew Marshall

RATING ++++++ 6



THE BOY WITH THE PORCELAIN BLADE

Author: Den Patrick
Publisher: Gollancz
Release Date: Out Now

Fantasy novels tend to be pitched in terms of other authors as a way of enticing potential readers in with a touch of familiarity and an unwritten claim of quality. The promotional material for *The Boy with the Porcelain Blade* name checks the likes of Mervyn Peake, Robin Hobb, Jon Courtenay Grimwood and Patrick Rothfuss. Though there are echoes of each of these great authors in the structure of this work, this debut novel by Den Patrick is not an imitation in any shape or form, rather a solid and brilliant book with a unique and engaging voice.

The novel is set in the kingdom of Landfall, a sprawling city-state that resembles a pseudo-Renaissance Italy, composed of various houses who are all attempting to gain power whilst an insane king stays in his tower issuing shadowy demands via his Majordomo. Patrick paints an oppressive and strange world, filled with many an unseen mystery. The tale focuses on the plight of Lucien de Fontein, a young man whose lack of ears marks him out as an orphan, one of the strangely formed foundlings who tend to possess great talents

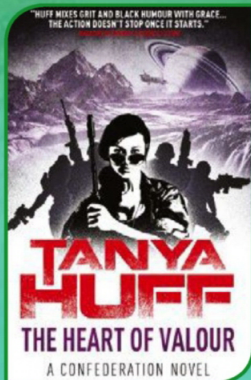
to compensate for their physical mutations. The narrative flips backwards and forwards through Lucien's life; half the book gives us an idea what Lucien's childhood has been like so far and the other half explores the boy's current troubles, which include impossible tests, exile and a mystery that runs through the core of the kingdom.

The main character is gloriously unlikeable. He's sarcastic, vain and self-obsessed. This makes him very believable and the perfect protagonist for Patrick's multi-layered story telling style. Den Patrick is an extremely talented author, creating a detailed and complex world that is effortless to read. A true page turner, *The Boy with the Porcelain Blade* is the first in a promised series called the *Erebus Sequence*, and it will be very interesting to see what happens next in the fascinating kingdom of Landfall.

Ed Fortune

RATING ++++++++ 9

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THE HEART OF VALOR

Author: Tanya Huff
 Publisher: Titan Books
 Release Date: Out Now

If there's anything to compliment about Tanya Huff's progression through this series, it's that she never takes a step back with her books. While certain themes will certainly arise time and again, usually problems with ranking individuals, it's always presented in some new way and methods are found to develop her universe.

Following on from the events of the last book, the recently promoted Torin Kerr has found herself sidelined in the war. Bored to tedium with the constant briefings and paperwork, she jumps at the chance to participate in a number of training scenarios when given the opportunity by an old friend. Unfortunately, the initially easy assignment is soon proven to have more problems than teaching grunts to shoot down training drones.

Away from the confines of a massive starship, the book feels like much more of a return to form. The environments and setting are somewhat closer to those which the first book featured and lack the issues which plagued the last book's milieu. The training environments prove to be something genuinely new to the series, offering great variety, and they are integrated into the plot far better than the starship was.

Furthermore, these grounds serve as an excuse to show just why Torin has managed to build up a small legend around herself,

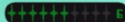
storming through these situations which should be stacked against the wet behind the ears trainees she is accompanying. Seeing her in part through the eyes of others in this way helps to better introduce her abilities before they really come into play against a true foe.

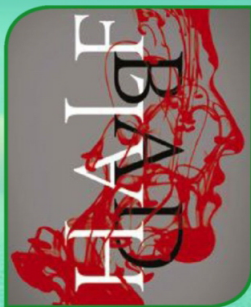
There is also a much better use of the various races here and their radically different biologies. Even after cultural integration there are problems which simply cannot be overcome.

Oddly, it's the character interaction which is weaker here. While some characters stand out well, there's only so many times that the recruits can come across as inexperienced before it becomes grating. This is something only made weaker by the occasions where Huff opts to dump information upon the reader rather than showing it.

While not as great a tale as *Valour's Choice*, *The Heart of Valour* is a step up from *The Better Part of Valour* and still a fun read. If you're after some great science fiction military action, with a good sense of humour, then give this one a look.

Callum Shephard

RATING 



HALF BAD

Author: Sally Green
 Publisher: Penguin Books
 Release Date: Out Now

With a launch in 36 countries and the film rights already in the hands of Fox, the publishing world seems to be preparing for a cuckoo reaction to the debut novel from Sally Green, a former accountant whose sharply

written tale about a society of witches residing in Britain contains all the ingredients for a fantastical smash hit. Brilliantly paced with more than a few nasty surprises, *Half Bad* is a wickedly addictive read that will capture the imagination of any fan of YA fiction.

The hero is Nathan, a 15 year-old who is locked in a cage, bound by shackles, exposed to the elements and slowly running out of escape plans. As a witch of mixed parentage, he's hunted by black and white witches, both seeking to create a singular and 'pure' race by eradicating the existence of the other. In this world of seemingly clear divides, he is the anomaly. The witch who is "wanted by no one; hunted by everyone."

This is how we are introduced to *Half Bad* in its spectacular opening chapters, dragged kicking and screaming into Nathan's shoes as he struggles to cope in his caged life with a vigorous daily exercise regime. Green takes you through his journey before and beyond, revealing a dark world filled with memorable characters and twisted family relations.


The societal themes may sound familiar, but *Half Bad* manages to dodge genre fatigue through the snappy and entertaining voice of its central character. Green's direct and efficient prose jets you along, delivering a story that gallops from one thrilling encounter to the next and creating a world of wicked witches that feels fast and surprisingly

uncompromising. These aren't the croaky broomstick-riding hags you've come to expect, neither are they highly romanticized beings caught up in love triangles; these are cold and ruthless sorcerers who pack a serious punch.

It's this dark, peppy spirit that sets the book apart from its contemporaries. Whenever the story delves into gruesome territory, Green isn't afraid to twist the knife, and you might be surprised by some of the wine-inducing scenes of torture and scraps that occur over the books entirety. But this isn't a bleak trip – quirky characters colour the world, and although you might crave a little more detail surrounding the bigger picture, the energy and charm is more than enough to keep you totally absorbed.

While the final verdict on *Half Bad* will depend upon the impact of the planned future instalments in the series, as a debut novel it is still a remarkably enjoyable read. Many have tipped it as doing for witches what *Twilight* achieved for vampires, but that seems like a great disservice to author Sally Green. *Half Bad* is edgy, imaginative and worth the attention of any fan of fictional thrill rides. A sure fire contender for the wickedest witch this side of the west.

Adam Starkey

RATING 



View From THE WATCHTOWER

Joel Harley pulls Monitor Duty to bring you the latest news from the mainstream...



It's a good time to be a fanboy. Leafing through the longboxes for this month's comic book news, I've come to the conclusion that we've rarely had it better. This month's latest brings a little something for everyone, from the usual DC and Marvel fans (crossovers and more!) to Trekkies, aficionados of 80s sci-fi and... well, not Whovians, for once. Sorry about that.

But first, as we so often do here, to the mainstream universes of Marvel and DC. With Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* movie looming, its bound-to-be-breakout character is getting his very own standalone series. Written and drawn by fan-favourite comic

creator Scottie Young, *Rocket Raccoon* promises all of the intergalactic fun, games and big guns you'd expect from a talking Raccoon with bad attitude. "Being able to play around with (...) this hyper-superhero intergalactic universe will be a lot of fun," Young told MTV News, hinting at Looney Tunes style action (well, Rocket is a talking Raccoon, after all), sci-fi weirdness and lots of the writer/illustrator's trademark humour. *Rocket Raccoon* is due to hit stands in July, one month before the film's UK release. Another soon-to-be movie star gets his own comic book in *What If? Age of Ultron*, kicking off in April. The comic imagines an alternate

universe in which The Wasp was killed instead of Hank Pym, before he could create the villainous robot Ultron (see the first *Age of Ultron* for the fairly complicated details) leading her husband to go on to create something even more terrible.

Talking of terrible: the Ultimate Universe's *Cataclysm* has been going on for a good while now, with world-eater Galactus drawing out the death and destruction for several months. Well, the man does like to savour his meals. This month, we see the aftermath in *Survive*. With New York City in ruins and many of its heroes dead (alas, resurrections are notoriously thin on the ground in the Ultimate Universe) the survivors must band together to rebuild their world. From the ashes, a new team of Ultimates will assemble. *Survive #1* is out now.

Also out this month is Mike Allred's *Silver Surfer #1*, which marries Allred's gorgeous bizarre sensibilities to one of the universe's more out there characters, occasional compatriot of Galactus, the Silver Surfer. Whatever stories Allred chooses to weave, we can be sure that they'll look fantastic. You'd have to be a Madman not to approve.

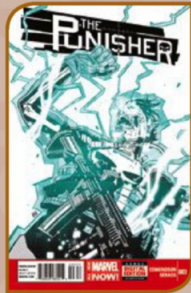
A less obvious pairing comes in this May's *Punisher #3*. Frank may have relocated to Los Angeles, but that hasn't stopped one of New York's more ostentatious baddies from bugging him there. Soon-to-be Big Bad (or at least one of them) of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, Electro clashes with the Punisher in LA. While this doesn't bode too well for Electro, given Castle's usual predilection for capital punishment, the promo pages seem to show Frank on the receiving end of most of the comic's violence. Still, they should both think themselves lucky that they're not in a Garth Ennis book.

Ennis would be proud of Marvel's latest gimmick, giving

away actual eyeballs to tie in with their *Original Sin* event. Not just any eyeballs either: those of The Watcher. Plastic ones too, I should probably point out. *Original Sin*, out this May, has the Watcher mysteriously murdered and dumped unceremoniously on the Moon. It's like a Marvel Whodunnit as Nick Fury enlists such familiar faces as Captain America, Iron Man, Thor and Wolverine to find out who murdered the Watcher, and why. Let's be honest, though, you don't care. You just want the eyeballs.

On that, frankly disgusting note, we skip Universes to DC, where we find Scott Snyder hard at work wrapping up his latest *Zero Year* arc with Batman. From the past to the future, where a brief trip there has revealed several intriguing spoilers ('spoiler' being the operative word) not least a new Robin (not called Robin), no Alfred and other such future nuggets.

Few, however, could have depicted *Batman and Frankenstein*, the latest crossover in the *Batman And...* series. As Batman and Frankenstein team up in search of Ra's al Ghul, who may have stolen the bodies of Damien and Talia (do we sense a





Lazarus Pit coming on?) it's the Greatest Crossover you Never Knew You Wanted. Just do us all a favour and feel free not to point out that Frankenstein is the creator's name. What do you think the Monster's surname is? Yes, Monster Frankenstein, probably.

There's more odd crossover shenanigans in Swamp Thing shows up in *Aquaman #31*, this May. The King of Atlantis battles the Avatar of the Green in a match-up that, yes, now that you mention it, seems more than a little genius. Judging from the cover, however, poor King Arthur seems a little outclassed. It's more than a little tiresome, all the 'Aquaman is rubbish' jokes, so, for his sake, we can only hope that he acquires himself well.

Doing rather well for himself despite his TV series finishing ages ago, is Tom Welling. The (eventual) Superman of the *Smallville* TV show and comics becomes Green Lantern. With the Lantern ring of Space Sector 2813 inactive for years following Krypton's destruction, it finally finds a suitable candidate – Clark Kent. Well, who says that Superman can't wield a power ring? John Stewart also shows up in *Smallville: Season 11: Lantern #1*, this April. Expect to

be outraged, as per their handling of Batman and so many other DC heroes. At least they haven't called him 'the green blur' though.

It's all TV and movie news from here on out, with stories to delight every fanboy. First up, a blast from a past with a trade release of *Robocop vs Terminator*. Dark Horse are republishing the

Frank Miller/Walter Simonson crossover in a special edition hardcover, released this July in the US. It's a great story, with both Miller and Simonson on top form. The Megadrive game isn't all that shabby either...

Completely different time frame and genre, but no less popular... *Miami Vice* is getting its own comic book, launched digitally by Lion Forge comics. Available through Amazon Kindle, ComicsPlus, Google Books and various other e-book outlets, you can expect to see Crockett and Tubbs back in action in '80s Miami, no doubt rocking plenty of outrageously bright suits, big guns and massive speedboats.

And if that wasn't '80s enough for you, there's the news that Boom! Studios and John Carpenter are teaming up this July to bring us *Big Trouble in Little China*. Featuring the further adventures of 1980s Jack Burton, the comic will pick up where the cult classic left off, courtesy of *Goon* creator Eric Powell and artist Brian Churilla. Everyone relax. Kurt Russell is here.

Over at IDW comics, meanwhile, Captain Kirk and his colleagues are heading where no man has gone before... only sort of, they already have... with a series of photonovels/comics from John Byrne. *Star Trek: New Visions* will see Byrne construct his own 'lost' episodes using a clever mix of



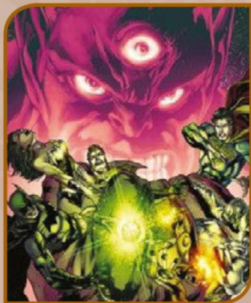
photo-manipulation, collage and trickery. The series begins with *In the Mirror, Cracked*, which is beaming into all good comics stores from May. And that's not all! In an unrelated project, Harlan Ellison's original script for the *Star Trek* episode *City on the Edge of Forever* is to be adapted, in full – Ellison's treatment was too long and over-budget – in a five issue miniseries for IDW comics. Scott and David Tipton will be handling the writing, with J.K. Woodward on main art duties. *The City on the Edge of Forever* is due to begin this June.

It's not all good news though. I told you, last month, of Titan's new line of *Doctor Who* comics. This is still true, but thanks to the irritating licensing laws that prevented IDW from publishing their *Doctor Who* in the UK, we won't be seeing it in print. A loophole makes the digital editions available, but that's all you're getting. Fans of more tactile media will either have to wait it out or resort to more underhand methods (hello eBay) to get their comic book fix. No Twelfth Doctor either, for the time being, *Doctor Who*, starring Doctors Ten and Eleven will be available in the US this July. At least the cover work looks good, even if Tennant's head looks a little photoshopped on...

And it's here we wrap up this month's Watchtower. Until next time, keep me informed of your latest purchases, comic book news and thoughts via the usual email and Twitter handles. Take it easy though – there's only so much excitement a man can handle. +

Joel Harley can be contacted at: joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted at @joelharley





JUSTICE LEAGUE VOL. 4 - THE GRID (THE NEW 52)

Author: Geoff Johns
Artist: Ivan Reis
Publisher: DC
Release Date: April 2nd

Theoretically, the A-list version of the Justice League should be a guarantee of entertaining and enjoyable super hero comic book fun. The chemistry between the likes of Wonder Woman, Batman, and Superman is well-trod ground, with each of them taking very specific roles. With this sort of easy and recognisable characterisation, all that's needed is a good story and the fun should follow.

It is thus slightly hard to understand quite why *Justice League Vol. 4: The Grid* is so bad. Certainly part of the reason is that it slots in with other storylines from the DC52 range and it does this very crudely. If you have been following other books such as the terribly named *Justice League Dark* and *Aquaman* then you're probably familiar with *Trinity War*, a crossover event that features Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman. If you've missed that element then you could buy the collected book, which might explain what's going on in this volume. If you don't have any of these products to hand then the middle of *Justice League Vol. 4: The Grid* will seem messy and barely comprehensible.

Another problem with the book is Geoff John's handle on the main characters. The point of the DC52 relaunch was to reimagine DC's iconic heroes for the modern day. Sadly the author's take on Superman is so wildly inconsistent that when a major reveal occurs mid-book it is very hard to work out if this is out of character for Superman. Wonder Woman is

similarly confused. Despite Brian Azzarello's fantastic work in her own book, John's has seemingly chosen to ignore this character development and presents the incredibly well-known hero as just another super-powered lady in a fancy costume, almost as if he hasn't a clue how to write women.

Add to this that every single story element is almost a greatest hits of classic Justice League storylines and what we have here is an extremely disappointing mess. The artwork is slightly above average and at about the quality we've come to expect from DC. There is no charm or radical change in style, simply workman-like art that is so familiar and safe that it's barely noticeable. This is a book that will only please the hardcore fans and completists.

Ed Fortune

RATING **++**



THE ROCKETEER AND THE SPIRIT- PULP FRICTION

Author : Mark Waid
Artist: Paul Smith, J. Bone
Publisher: IDW
Release Date: April 1st

Pairing up The Rocketeer with The Spirit is one of those team-ups that seems obvious when you see it. Both are two-fisted pulp action heroes with hilarious sidekicks and a lady friend who has the habit of getting into all sorts of dangerous situations.

The plot is a nice mix of the sort of thing each hero has to deal with. Rocketeer stories tend to feature technology going awry, whereas The Spirit tends to deal with a lot of crime and conspiracy. The tale begins when the body of a technologist is found in LA, only a few short hours after witnesses swear that they saw him alive and well on the other side of the country. Both The Spirit and The Rocketeer find themselves investigating the case from different angles and, in true pulp fiction style, sparks fly when they cross paths.

The Rocketeer's love interest, Betty (based on iconic fetish model Bettie Page) is, oddly enough, the one character that doesn't mesh. In previous Rocketeer adventures Betty has been flirty, spunky, clever but easily duped. In this tale she seems like an entirely different person and the only reason for the change is to give the two heroes something to get angry and angry about. Though this fits in well with the genre it does seem a little lazy. The two heroes also feel a little interchangeable at times, even though they couldn't be more different, and you get the feeling that writer Mark Waid isn't as familiar with The Spirit as he is with the other hero. However these are minor gripes

in the context of the work as a whole. It's filled with fun little moments, such as Cliff's reaction to The Spirit's secret origins and the mysterious power of television.

The art suits the book extremely well. The Rocketeer's world is bright and loud, whereas The Spirit is slightly more muted and strange. Though we have two different artists with two distinctive styles, both Bone and Smith know exactly what era they need to draw their inspiration from and this graphic novel could fit in easily with classic books from the era. *The Rocketeer* and *The Spirit: Pulp Friction* is well paced, unchallenging and slightly silly, which is exactly how it should be.

Ed Fortune

RATING **++++++**





HELHEIM VOLUME 1 - THE WITCH WAR

Author: Cullen Bunn
Artist: Joëlle Jones, Nick Filardi
Publisher: Oni Press
Release Date: March 26th

These days, if you want a barren wasteland for your fantasy adventure story, you make the entire setting vaguely Norse. Make no mistake; despite the name, *Helheim* is only faintly Viking-inspired at best. The name is well chosen though. "Helheim" means "place of punishment" and this graphic novel does feel like a penance of sorts.

The slender plot revolves around a bold young hero called Rikard who is the champion of his village and protector of a strange red-haired lady. After an assault on his village by an army of undead fiends, Rikard dies. Unfortunately for him, the strange girl is in fact an evil witch who stitches him back together, adds some over-sized muscles, then raises him from the dead, planning to use him as some sort of engine of revenge. As grief-handling strategies go it's a pretty dramatic one and things get sillier from that point onwards.

Rikard goes on to kill demons, monsters and people as well as seeking out those responsible for his tortured state. He also picks up a spooky companion who's sole point seems to be to spew exposition and be a bit creepy. This is a rock album cover of a story and it certainly looks the part. A Viking-like berserker with horns and over-sized body parts running around frost-covered lands butchering monsters with a huge axe has a certain sort of appeal and artistic team Joëlle Jones and Nick

Filardi handle their duties admirably. It definitely looks pretty enough in a gore-covered, blood-drenched sort of way. The entire thing feels so rock and roll that you can almost hear Iron Maiden playing in the background.

Ultimately, however, the coolness of the art and concept doesn't carry the badly planned story far enough, making what is intended to be an epic tale of blood, magic and revenge simply a rather silly pile of mismatched ideas and cringe-worthy dialogue. If you crank the heavy metal soundtrack up to 11 and leave your brain in the fridge then you might get a kick out of this, otherwise it's entirely forgettable.

Ed Fortune

RATING ★★★★★ 4



WONDER WOMAN VOLUME 4 - WAR

Author: Brian Azzarello
Artist: Eduardo Risso
Publisher: DC
Release Date: Out Now

The DC52 reboot of Wonder Woman has been a very good thing for the well known super-heroine. Wonder Woman has never quite picked up the same sort of recognition as her fellow heroes, Superman and Batman, and this is in part due to a vague origin story. Whereas Batman is a vigilante and Superman is a friendly alien, Wonder Woman is described as an Amazon and that is simply another way of saying female warrior. This makes for a very vague hook to hang adventures from and in the past has led to some fairly weak stories. During the reboot, Eisner Award-winning writer Brian Azzarello took the opportunity to swing the Amazon into a new but familiar direction, that of Greek myth.

Wonder Woman Volume 4: War collects issues 19 to 23 of the monthly comic book and brings to a close a story arc that began with issue one of the re-launched series. In this version of events, Wonder Woman's powers come from the fact that she is a child of the Greek god Zeus. When a baby called Zeke (also a child of the gods) is prophesied to bring great change to the gods, Wonder Woman swings in to protect the mother and child from those who would wish the baby dead. Previous volumes have been pretty much a chase and survive story with the gods trying to outmanoeuvre the titular heroine and her band of plucky allies.

In *War* this situation comes to

an ultimate end, with far-reaching consequences for the continuing story arc. One of the interesting additions Azzarello has made to the team is Orion – an alien god of War from the world of New Genesis. Orion is a critical character in DC's cosmic-level adventures and it's nice to see him here being brave, surly and trying to chat up the main character. He foreshadows Wonder Woman's own potential fate as well as adding to the series' over-arching themes of duty and consequence. A key element in this tale so far is that doing the right thing is not always the smart thing and this lends a classically tragic feel to the entire affair.

Eduardo Risso's art is moody and atmospheric. The artist resists the urge to turn the main character into a cheesy fantasy for bored teenagers, instead concentrating on a more heroic and action-based style. The mortals look weak and vulnerable, the god-like creatures look terrifying, blood-drenched and nightmarish. Risso captures Azzarello's storytelling style perfectly and this results in a very natural read. If you've never gotten into the character but have always wanted to, then now is as good a time as any as the collected volumes simply keep getting better.

Ed Fortune

RATING ★★★★★ 7

PIXEL JUICE

News and
Previews
in Gaming by
Lee Price



The Good – Batman: Arkham Knight Announced

So the last of the famed *Arkham* series is now finally on its way. *Arkham Knight* has been officially announced for the PS4, PC and Xbox One, though Rocksteady have yet to give any details on a potential release date.

The game will see The Scarecrow take up the mantle of main villain of the piece, as he reunites a selection of Batman's rogues gallery that will include Harley Quinn and Penguin in an effort to rid Gotham's criminal underworld of Bats forever.

The game will also feature the introduction of a drivable Batmobile for the first time in the *Arkham* series, combining with the regular action that fans are used to. As long as it avoids the bug issues that have caused problems with the last titles in the series, you can expect something pretty special from this one.

The Bad – Uncharted Writer Leaves Naughty Dog

Amy Hennig, the creative director and main writer for the acclaimed *Uncharted* series, has left Naughty Dog amidst claims that she was forced out of the company.

She had been involved in the creation of the next title in the series, which is soon to be hitting a PS4 near you.

Random sources are claiming that Neil Druckmann and Bruce Straley, who played a large part in the creation of *The Last of Us*, had a role in her decision to leave, but that has yet to be confirmed.

Sony released the following statement: *"We can confirm that Amy Hennig has left Naughty Dog. Amy has made significant contributions to the game industry and we appreciate all she has done for Naughty Dog. The development timeline of Uncharted will not be impacted."*

Something doesn't quite sit right with this one...

The Ugly – Irrational Games is Closing, but 2K Games Claim More BioShock is Coming

I debated with myself for a while (well about a minute) over which section of the column this should fall in. In the end, I settled on ugly for the simple fact that Irrational Games is closing and more than 100 people, many of whom worked on one of the most highly acclaimed series of the previous generation, will be losing their jobs. Worst of all, it appears that it may

have been Ken Levine's decision!

The mastermind behind *BioShock* is keeping a small team and will continue to work with 2K Games. However, considerably more worrying is that 2K has promised more *BioShock*, but has not confirmed that Levine will be involved.

Why on earth does Irrational have to bite the dust after having performed so well? It just seems extremely unfair that so many people who worked so hard on the series will be losing their jobs, whilst the series that they worked so hard on will continue without them. Who will work on it for a start? By the sounds of it Levine's team will be much too small to take up such an endeavour. It must be a complete kick in the teeth to have your hard work rewarded with the sack, only to then hear confirmation that the series you helped bring to the forefront of gaming is continuing.

The Odd – Portal Board Game is on the Way

Valve has announced that it will be teaming up with Cryptozic to bring the *Portal* board game to the coffee tables of gamers across the world. The game will see players assume a role similar to GLaDOS as they attempt to kill off subjects.

The game will allow for between two

and four players and will be a competitive experience that allows players to eliminate both their own test subjects and their opponents.

Valve's Jeep Barnett commented: "From the very first prototype, the core mechanic struck us as unique and compelling. As it evolved, it survived our rigorous process of external playtesting and iteration."

I honestly don't see how a game that is essentially one giant physics puzzle is going to translate to a board. However, switching the player's role into that of the antagonist may just be the key. This could well be worth checking out. After all, who couldn't use a drunken night of killing of Aperture Science test subjects?

The Rest - More *Mortal Kombat* Coming?

Fans of Liu Kang and co. may well have something to celebrate following a slip of the tongue by Kiefer Sutherland during an interview with *ign.com*.

The 24 actor, who is taking over the mantle of Solid Snake from David Hayter for reasons that aren't exactly clear, was speaking about his role in the upcoming *MGS* games.

He said "I did *Mortal Kombat*, and that's such a huge game, but it's so not like (*MGS 5*). Of course, keen *MK* fans will note that Sutherland has not been part of any game in the series thus far, so logic dictates that he must be referring to an upcoming title that may not be too far away.

There isn't any official confirmation as of yet, but considering the success of the last couple of *MK* games a new title was pretty much a given. It will be interesting to see what Kiefer brings to the table.

Phantom Pain to be 200X Bigger Than *Ground Zeroes*

There was a whole lot of moaning about how *MGSV: Ground Zeroes* was only a two-hour game. Rightly so in some respects seeing as gamers were initially expected to pay full price for the title before Konami saw the light and knocked the price down.

Now it seems that *Ground Zeroes* was never meant as anything more than an appetiser for the main course, as Hideo Kojima has come out to say that *Phantom Pain* will be 200 times larger. He has even expressed fears that gamers will simply not be able to finish the title! He also stated that *MGSV* was never intended to be a two-parter, with the decision to split the games coming about as Konami needed something for the PS4 launch.

It all sounds like hyperbole to me, especially as I'm a bit of an *MGS* cynic and am assuming that much of that "size" will be taken up by cutscenes. Still, Kojima has never been



one to really go along with the gaming crowd, as anybody who remembers *MGS2* basically trolling gamers with Raiden after promising Snake can attest to. Still, the prospect of such an enormous *MGS* game can only be exciting to the fans, following the disappointment that surrounded *Ground Zeroes*.

Final Fantasy XV is Edging Closer

I'm not a fan of any *Final Fantasy* past the tenth title. *XII* was meh and *XIII* was just god-awful in my book. Yet I still can't help but feel a twinge of excitement whenever news of another game in the series starts to make the rounds. Perhaps it's the rose-tinted glasses but I would love for the *FF* series to deliver something as life changing as *Final Fantasy VII* was for me.

Somehow I doubt that is going to happen. However fans of the series will be delighted to hear that series producer Yoshinori Kitase has claimed that the latest *Final Fantasy* is "quite far into development" and has been given a very high priority level. Hardly surprising as the series is still essentially a license to print money.

No news on the next *Kingdom Hearts* yet, but that's to be expected.

Thief Studio Hit With Layoffs

It seems that the way to reward a dedicated group of developers who have just delivered the latest AAA title these days is to fire them. With Irrational going under it seems that Sony are looking to follow suit by getting rid of 27 of the people who worked on the recent reboot of the *Thief* series.

Game quality aside (it is nowhere near as good as *Thief II*), the title has only been out for a couple of weeks and to see studios treating their staff as though they are essentially independent contractors brought in for the development of a single game is a worrying thought.

Is this the cost of the constant requirement for heavier investment into the latest major releases?

PS4 Hits 6 Million Sales

Sony have staked their claim to be considered early champions of the current generation following the announcement that the PS4 has already sold more than 6 million units worldwide.

Similar figures are not available for the Xbox One at the time of writing, as Microsoft haven't released anything official, however the scuttlebutt from companies like The NPD Group suggests that Sony's box of tricks is outselling the Xbox One at a 2:1 margin.

The less said about the Wii U's sales figures the better.

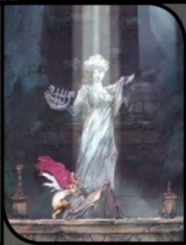


THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2 (ALL PLATFORMS) - APR 25TH



Well the film is nearly upon us, so we of course must have the tie-in game. Now I must admit, the last game was actually quite fun. Certainly nothing taxing or particularly groundbreaking, but fun nonetheless. Expect more of the same from Spidey and crew, with poor voice acting because none of the main actors will be involved (going off the example of the first at least), but plenty of fan service and the rather cool rush of playing Spidey as he does the web swinging thing.

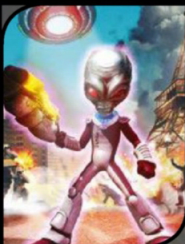
CHILD OF LIGHT (ALL PLATFORMS) APR 30TH



This one looks intriguing. *Child of Light* revolves around a character called Aurora, who contracts an illness that sends her to sleep. Upon awaking she finds herself in a strange new world that has had its Sun, Moon and stars stolen by an evil queen. Ubisoft's latest promises to sate the appetites of fans of the old-school, mixing simple RPG mechanics with side scrolling platforming.

DESTROY ALL HUMANS: PATH OF THE FURON (360, PS3) - MAY 1ST

Ah, to be an alien who specialises in murdering the bejesus out of people in weird and wonderful ways. The first *Destroy All Humans*, though not an amazing game, was plenty of fun. Especially for those who enjoy their sci-fi. The newest in the series shifts the action to the 1970s and has you control Crypto as he juggles running a casino with... well destroying all of the humans of course. Expect fun but not a lot else.

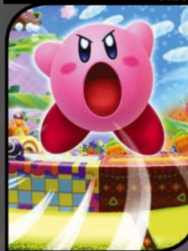


KILLER IS DEAD: NIGHTMARE EDITION (PS3, 360, PC) - MAY 9TH



I have tons of love for Suda 51. For me, *Killer7* is a dark horse contender for the best game of its particular generation. *Killer is Dead* is one of the newest games to come from his beautifully warped mind. The original game took place in the near future, with the player taking the role of an executioner who takes jobs and murders people horribly with a sword and a cybernetic arm that can convert into a bunch of other weapons. Look out for this one!

KIRBY TRIPLE DELUXE (3DS) MAY 16TH

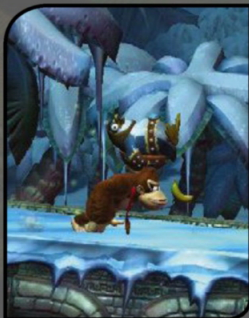


Is it just me, or does Nintendo appear to have pretty much given up providing decent support for the Wii U? All of their most interesting looking titles seem to be showing up on the 3DS these days. This is yet another one of them. *Triple Deluxe* is the 13th title in the famed *Kirby* series. This time around the game is in 2.5D and Kirby can move into both the fore and background at will, because that's an original mechanic that hasn't been around since the 16 bit days. Should still be fun.

WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER (PC, PS3, 360, NEXT-GEN) - MAY 20TH

As we all know, the *Wolfenstein* series was the first big name in the FPS genre. However, with the advent of *Doom* and the eventual evolution of the genre, the series has fallen behind the times a little bit, with the last couple of iterations being quite underwhelming. *The New Order* will look to change that. However, it's the first in the series to be developed without the input of id. Is that a mistake, or will the series receive the breath of fresh air it has sorely needed for quite a while?





DONKEY KONG COUNTRY: TROPICAL FREEZE

Developers: Retro Studios, Monster Games, Nintendo SDS
Publisher: Nintendo
Platform: Wii U
Release Date: Out Now

After 2010's much-loved reboot of the *Donkey Kong Country* series for the Wii, *Tropical Freeze* acts as the confident sequel that improves upon everything that came before. New levels have been introduced, the volume of monkeys has doubled and the enemies are

no longer forgettable Tiki masks with psychic powers. Nope, this time around Donkey Kong Island has been invaded by the Snowmads, a group of Viking penguins, owls, walruses and other 'iced-up' creatures that threaten to place the lush tropical surroundings under a deep freeze. As a strong advocate of the no banana should be served cold policy, Donkey Kong and pals set out on an adventure across six worlds of side-scrolling platform madness to thwart the meddlesome foes.

New to the formula this time around is a selection of companions. As well as the returning Diddy Kong with his hovering jet-pack ability, we now have Dixie who can use her curly curls for a mild jump boost and Cranky, who pulls off his best Scrooge McDuck impression to bounce around levels on his walking stick. These new additions provide a welcome change of pace, each companion has their merits and matching each one's strengths to the levels ahead is often the key to success in *Tropical Freeze*.


To those unfamiliar with the Donkey Kong Country series, the platforming isn't as fluid as other recent genre heavyweights like *Rayman Legends* or *Super Mario 3D World*. It's purposefully weightier, with the thrills and spills coming from your interaction with the dynamic and unpredictable level designs. Rolling through grass patches to reveal hidden areas, holding onto a wall only for it to collapse upon your touch and manoeuvring in a mine-cart as the track crumbles around you, the levels are keen to test your quick fire reactions, meaning the cold hand of death is always a mere banana slip away.

Tropical Freeze however improves upon its predecessor by making this never feel cheap. Whereas *DKCR* was often bogged down by cases of trial and error, the sequel feels a little more balanced and forgiving through the consistently brilliant level design. You'll still be left clawing at the curtains, plotting Arctic creature genocide, but it's an enjoyable and short-lived frustration. It's also very difficult to remain frustrated when the soundtrack is so wonderful. David Wise, the composer behind the original *Donkey Kong Country* games, makes a spectacular return here, playing with nostalgic classics and bringing in new numbers that elevate the charm of the entire package.

Occasionally the perspective switches into the third dimension during some of the game's intense barrel blasting or rocket chase sequences. At these moments the impressive graphical details on Donkey Kong and the levels really shine, and it's a shame it isn't used more over the game's entirety. The same goes for the integration with the Wii U Gamepad, which is practically unused apart from to allow for off-screen play. A disappointment considering Nintendo normally set the creative standards for their home consoles.

Despite these small missed opportunities, *Tropical Freeze* is still a brilliantly designed platformer that will delight those looking for a challenging ride.

Adam Starkey

RATING 



THIEF

Developers: Eidos Montreal, Nixxes Software BV
Publisher: Square Enix
Platform: PC, Playstation 3, Playstation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One
Release Date: Out Now

The latest in a long line of classic series reboots from SquareEnix, *Thief* sees the return of Garrett to his home town after his departure years ago. Ravaged by a plague and on the verge of open class war, the situation is more volatile than ever. The perfect environment for any opportunist seeking to make his personal fortune.

While an interesting concept that steps away from the magic vs science conflict of previous games, the class war is little more than window dressing here. It might work in terms of flavour, but by the second half it is shoved squarely into the background. And notwithstanding decent visuals and background dialogue, there's not enough focus or substance to the goings-on. That said, there is still a decent game to be had here.

Far from killing being rewarded, it's a very good idea to avoid combat. Along with cutting into your hard-earned stolen goods, you'll soon find that going toe-to-toe with most guards is not an easy thing. Instead the tried-and-true method of staying out of sight and using a wide assortment of gadgets is always the best option. Between discarded bottles to be hurled as distractions, Garrett's arsenal of superhero style utility arrows and disarming tools, there is plenty here to

work with. Whether it's extinguishing light sources to make life difficult for guards or shooting out the cables on hanging crates, a lot of thought has obviously been put into the opportunities the environments offer.

Despite the equipment on offer however, the environments themselves are a very mixed bunch. Unlike previous titles where you could quite happily wander about to your heart's content, here the levels feel far too linear in nature. It's not that the stealth involved isn't challenging, but far too often the way in which the player can move about unseen is simply too obvious. This can be especially true when air vents are involved. It's an experience similar to *Crysis 2* in many respects; with half the environments being little more than glorified corridors and the others wide open areas brimming with choice.

Thief is by no means a truly bad game, it still has much to offer, but it does squander a lot of its potential. For all the fun to be had creeping about stealing every shiny thing in sight, it's hard to ignore that nagging sense that this could have been so much better.

Callum Shepherd

RATING 



THE LAST OF US: LEFT BEHIND

Developer: Naughty Dog
Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment
Platform: PS3
Release Date: Out Now

Set during the winter events of *The Last of Us*, *Left Behind's* DLC sees Ellie scavenging medical supplies for a badly wounded Joel. Avoiding Clickers and the hordes of hostile humans hunting for prey, Ellie begins to think back to the times before meeting Joel, and the last moments she shared with a childhood friend.

While anyone who has played *The Last of Us* before will know how both of these stories end, the game does a remarkable job of fleshing out the events. The hints of each character's past are utilised here, with players finally seeing a crucial moment which shaped Ellie's outlook on life. At the same time the DLC expands upon a largely skipped chapter in a way that greatly benefits the overall game, with each story complementing the other. The flashbacks introduce her initial skills and provide a relatively few genuinely happy moments to contrast with the desperate struggle of current events. Ellie's search in the winter meanwhile retains the bleak atmosphere of the original and her harrowing journey.

Along with telling us of the history of the DLC's protagonist, *Left Behind's* mechanics are introduced in surprisingly well integrated ways. These are usually as a part of her history via some almost prophetic flashback scenes, many of which introduce her skills in some innocent manner only for them to become crucial in the current story's life or death situations.

Said situations consist of facing down

handfuls of foes at a time and more often than not having to utterly avoid them. Unlike the nearsighted foes with little to no short term memory which populate the likes of *Metal Gear Solid*, those found in *The Last of Us* provide far more of a challenge. Confronting them directly or even trying to pick them off one by one will likely backfire on you horrifically. Instead, it is often the better option to use environmental means or other elements to deal with hostile foes.

The environments are as beautifully morose as those found in the original. Crumbling buildings, streets teeming with wildlife and overgrown habitats are as great here as we've come to expect. With missions designed more for greater stealth this time, you're granted more opportunities to move past foes and it's made clear just how vulnerable Ellie is to the better-armed foes she faces.

There really is nothing to criticise here without reducing the review to pedantic nitpicking. Everything which the original got right is nailed here, the mechanics remain solid and the DLC's integration into the overall plot helps make its short length almost unnoticeable. If you have *The Last of Us* and want more, this really is an essential development within the story.

Callum Shephard

RATING 10



LIGHTNING RETURNS: FINAL FANTASY XIII

Developers: Square Enix, tri-Ace
Publisher: Square Enix
Platform: Playstation 3, Xbox 360
Release Date: Out Now

Of all the gaming failures to be released in the past few years, *Final Fantasy XIII* is easily one of the most confusing. Harshly criticised for combat changes and extreme linearity, the news it was getting sequels was truly a surprise. With *XIII-2* improving upon a handful of aspects, there was some hope that *Lightning Returns* might have turned things completely around. Unfortunately it's as bad as ever.

Already infamous for an atrocious storyline and poorly defined world, this final chapter does the impossible, managing not only to be utterly predictable, but also being so bafflingly poorly presented that you can barely grasp onto any grounding facts. The story's staging is actually fine, but the problems lie in the execution. It's so ham-fistedly horrific and the narrative twists so laughably ludicrous that it is near impossible to follow or take seriously. Combined with Ali Hillis' deadpan delivery of atrocious dialogue, and you'll be having *Metroid: Other M* flashbacks before the first hour is done.

So the story is as bad as can be expected, what about the mechanics? Having undergone a major overhaul, the mechanics contain some of *XIII's* basic set-up with new elements. The much improved combat system is most welcome among these, Lightning's ability to switch between classes turning the fights into rapid, tactical brawls. With bars limiting the number of attacks you can make per outfit, you must choose when to use which attack as you fight on the move. With added customisation

and differing stats, this ensures that the battles are a dynamic experience. Despite an attempt at turning the combat into fan-service roulette, it ultimately serves as a superior version of the Paradigm Shift system.

Unfortunately the same praise cannot be given to the other elements. The quest-based experience system encourages repeated replays of the game. Combined with limited numbers of days and certain opportunities to be found in each one, you need to start again and again to complete everything. Unfortunately this element is badly mishandled. Along with giving you more time than you possibly need to complete sub-quests en masse, there is still the issue of grinding with so many missions boiling down to fetch quests.

There's also no story or discovery to be found in new choices upon replays. So it pales in comparison to *Final Fantasy VI*, *Sar Ocean: Second Story*, and even *LoZ: Majora's Mask*. The latter even handles the replay mechanic better than this game at every turn.

If you want a good *Final Fantasy* experience, return to games of yesteryear. *Lightning Returns* gets the combat right, but nothing else. With a story this poor the series will only benefit from being rid of her. Don't waste your time or money with this one.

Callum Shephard

RATING 4

Retro BYTES

a look back at
the World of
Retro Gaming
by Chris Jackson



P.Y.T. (PLEASE YOUR THUMBS)

So here we are then - *Moonwalker*, the game based on the ego-stroking cinematic masterpiece from was-he-or-wasn't-he pop superstar Michael Jackson. In some ways it's quite tricky to play this game now we know what we know, but imagine you're living at the end of the 1980s - *Bad* is your favourite album, the *Moonwalker* movie has just confused the hell out of you and completely blown your mind at the same time, MJ is the biggest superstar on the planet, and we haven't heard about any of the bad stuff yet. Suddenly you find out there's a *Moonwalker* game that lets you play as Michael, running around scenes from the film beating up bad guys and generally saving the day. "Mum! I need a Mega Drive! Now!!"

A few different versions of the game arrived throughout 1989 and 1990. The first home computer versions on the Atari, C64 and Amiga were understandably vastly different from the arcade version that appeared in 1990, which itself differed from Sega's Mega Drive (or Genesis, for our American cousins) edition later that same year. While the computer version featured various different styles of gameplay throughout its four levels, and the arcade version was graphically as fancy as it could be at the time (and also allowed for multiplayer on certain cabinets), the Mega Drive version seems to have stood the test of time more than any of the others. In the UK, *Moonwalker* (the game) was released just two months after the Mega Drive console

had become available, capitalising on both Michael Jackson's superstardom as well as the public's desire for software to play on their new consoles, leading to high sales figures and an enduring legacy that over the years have together helped earn the game cult status among many gamers.

Possibly the most fascinating thing about *Moonwalker* is that it manages to be absolutely perfect while at the same time being... well... not very good. The game starts with a white-suited MJ flicking a coin into a jukebox and striking a pose as the lights come on and an amazing 16-bit version of *Smooth Criminal* starts to play. It's immediately obvious that you're in the nightclub scene from the actual *Smooth Criminal* video - even the self-lowering ladder/staircase thing makes an appearance, as well as the angry man by the pool table. Seeing one of the biggest and most iconic music videos of the time recreated right in front of our eyes in the very first level was enough to tell us we were onto a winner, but there were plenty of more exciting things still to come...

We're given enough time to have a quick fumble with the controller before bad guys rush the screen, revealing one attack button, one for jumping, and another for special powers. There's even a button combo to perform the moonwalk. The attacks are pretty special - standing on the ground, MJ kicks a leg out and sends glittery sparks flying from his toes, killing (or injuring, in the case of a few of the stronger enemies) anyone in his path. Jump attacks are similar, except the shiny magic dust emanates from his fingers instead of his toes. The special attacks are also pretty stunning - one can be partially charged up to unleash a projectile attack, where MJ launches his hat across the screen to wipe everybody out, or when the attack is fully charged all of the enemies on screen become hypnotised and join Michael in re-enacting a few dance moves popularised by whichever one of MJ's songs is currently playing.

While you're getting carried away with all this high-kicking and posing, there's also an important task to be completed in each level. Find those kids! No, seriously, the aim of the game is to find hidden children. Each level has a set number of kids to be picked up (they've come to be known as "Katie's", due to their resemblance to the little girl in the *Moonwalker* movie), indicated by icons along the bottom of the screen. They're never too

hard to find - they're always behind doors or windows, apart from one near the end of the game who's hidden away behind a sodding waterfall that you don't even realise you can interact with. Once all the little buggers have been found, MJ's chimpy mate Bubbles flies onto the screen and parks himself on Michael's shoulder (or sometimes face, depending which way Michael's moving and Bubbles is pointing), gesturing wildly towards a certain part of the level. Following Bubbles' guidance, you'll arrive at what amounts to an end of level boss, which is nothing more than an "enemy rush" sort of situation where you might have to contend with 6-8 baddies all at once. This is where the special charge attack comes in handy though - make sure you've got enough power left to crank it out at the end of one of the "woods" levels where you can make a screen full of zombies do a bit of the *Thriller* dance!

Once you get to the end of the opening nightclub level, it's out onto the streets where the search for kids begins again (they're mostly locked in car boots this time). This is the main problem with the game - nothing really changes apart from the backdrops to each level, right up until the final confrontation with Mr Big which sees you shooting lasers at him from the cockpit of the spaceship MJ turns into, in one of the most spectacular anticlimactic game-ending boss fights of all time.

Each level is split into three parts, so you get to search the nightclub three times, then run around three lots of streets, then on to three different woods/graveyard scenarios and so on. While most of the levels reference parts of the movie, and running around shouting "ow!" while throwing high-kicks around the place never really gets old, it could really do with a few gameplay changes to stop things from getting quite so repetitive. There's a decent variety of enemies, with different baddies in each level,



but they're all pretty easy to kill (zombies are a bit of a headache though, as you'd probably expect). And once you've shoved one gravestone aside to see if there's a young girl hiding behind it, you don't really want to bother doing it another five hundred times.

That being said though, there's more than enough good stuff to warrant further investigation if you've never played it before. The awesome soundtrack never fails to keep spirits high (except maybe when *Another Part Of Me* comes on - did anyone really ever like that one?), and the ridiculous amount of posing and sparkly glitter-punches manages to remain amusing for the entire length of the game. Oh, and did we mention you can turn into a robot? Collecting kids in the right order sends a shooting star flying across the screen, and if you're lucky enough to catch it...

We can't lie, playing *Moonwalker* today is a lot different to playing it in 1990. Back then it was just an amazing platformer that

everyone just had to play, but knowing how things turned out it's easy to take a more suspicious view of things. Which doesn't stop it from still being an awesome game, of course. Take yourself back to more innocent times and enjoy this one for what it is - a tremendous (if slightly overindulgent) example of 16-bit platforming, easy to pick up and play, looks great, with an instantly recognisable soundtrack featuring around half a dozen of MJ's best-known hits. Long may it live on in the hearts of all who were there first time around.

Before we go, here's a quick recommendation of something else to look out for - *Power Blade* (bottom left) is a title that doesn't really warrant much discussion but it's still worthy of your time (plus mentioning it here fills up the last couple of hundred words which saves the graphics people having to stretch the screenshots which would make them look really terrible).

Released by Taito on the NES in 1992, it's a fairly shameless *Mega Man* ripoff where players control a futuristic glorified security guard tasked with retrieving data tapes in order to reboot a master computer which has been taken offline by naughty aliens. The similarities to *Mega Man* are everywhere, from the layout of the levels to the enemies, even as far as the way your character feels when he's running around the screen. Even the fact that levels can be tackled in any order, and a final one opens up after the first six have been completed, reminds you of Capcom's little blue best selling hero. Given the fact that *Power Blade* borrows so much from such a popular franchise, that it's been completely forgotten is maybe not such a massive surprise. Shameless ripoffs don't always have to be bad though - *Power Blade* received many positive reviews when it was released, and still holds up today. Highly recommended if you fancy a bit of mindless platform blasting!





ROLL FOR DAMAGE



Ed Fortune guides you into the realm of tabletop gaming



players pick an alien overlord to be, and each one of these characters has a unique power that can rapidly shift the balance of power turn by turn. The original version of the game (which came out in the mid-seventies) only featured six would-be alien rulers but the most recent iteration of the game features dozens of them, each with a silly name and odd power.

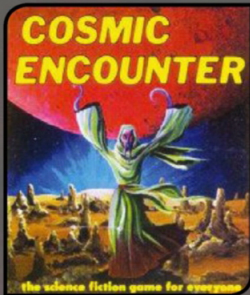
As with many popular boardgames it's enjoyed a rather chequered history when it comes to publication. This really isn't that remarkable; many well-loved games have come and gone depending on who can sell what to whom. Now defunct publisher Eon developed the game and it was very quickly a hit. Because of its success they produced piles of add-ons, mostly adding aliens and extending the number of people who can play to six. At the time producing a game that only catered for a small number of people and then selling a separate box that let the entire family play was a new thing. Sadly these days it has become standard practice. Eon then passed the game to West End Games, who produced a version that was utterly incompatible with the previous edition. Games Workshop got in on the act as well, producing a wild variant that mixed and matched the rules from Eon's previous expansions. The game went out of fashion in the eighties, partially due to the bewildering variety of products out there. Mayfair Games produced a stripped down version called *Simply Cosmic* in the

There are a disturbing number of boardgames out there that focus on galactic domination. Maybe it's the fault of the *Star Wars* movies; after all, the Emperor and Darth Vader are so bad at their jobs it's hard not to want to tell them off and have a go at interstellar conquest yourself. *Cosmic Encounters* is widely regarded as the classic game for would-be despots with inter-planetary ambition, but also happens to be a pretty sweet family game.

The set-up is relatively simple. Each player has their own solar system's worth of planets and in order to win, they must own a lot more. You also have a nifty fleet of UFOs at your disposal so you can cheerfully go and invade other worlds (namely the worlds owned by other players). Cards are drawn to determine which player you can attack next, though

you don't have to attack at all if you don't want to. This makes for a game of rapidly shifting allegiances and evil genius style chuckling. Clever mechanics (such as defeated UFOs going into the centre of the board, making it easy to work out who is losing) keep the game fast flowing and social. This is amplified by the option to negotiate rather than attack – diplomacy can be used to eventually conquer the galaxy as well. Typically it's worth the odd bit of peaceful trade simply to make your opponents wonder what you're up to. *Cosmic Encounters* is a game that requires either a poker face or a big friendly grin, though neither really help.

Each player also has a deck of cards that confer advantages – equipment, weirdly specific powers and of course bonuses to attack or defend. In addition



'90s and it quickly went out of production shortly after that. Even Hasbro got in on the act in 2000, trotting out a version with plastic counters and plenty of aliens.

The most recent version came out in 2007 and is still in production. Fantasy Flight Games (who have a habit of reviving old yet profitable games) launched a 5 player version with about 50 different aliens and many variant rules. Subsequent expansions add an extra player or simply expand on existing rules. More importantly it has proper plastic UFO pieces that stack on top of each other, perfect for making little 'zoom' and 'pew pew' noises when you blow up another player's homeworld.

A game with a less involved history (but happens to be just as much fun) is *Eminent Domain*. Rather than a simple flat out 'invade and destroy' approach, this game allows you to assemble a galactic civilisation. You can conquer all known space through force, science, trade, surveys or colonisation. Every time you successfully complete an action you get points and the most points win.

It's a cute little card-driven game reminiscent of games like *Puerto Rico* and can be a bit of an acquired taste. At the beginning of the game each player has the same deck of cards, with 2 cards for each role. Every turn you must choose a role to perform (and your opponents will get a chance to copy you). In doing so you add one of those role cards to your deck. When executing a role, you can boost its effect by playing cards out of your hand matching the role. So the more you research, the better you get at researching. This does tend to mean that everyone does a spot of 'monkey see, monkey do' and you can get everyone trying for the same win. Luckily if you run out of role cards in one or two

roles, the game ends.

One of the niftiest bits of *Eminent Domain* is that many space actions require the use of cool space ship counters. These look nice and also help the player keep track of exactly what nefarious scheme they're up to. This is important because it's a game about getting the right cards in the right order – start off too strong in military matters and your opponents will out-science you. Fail to explore and colonise sufficiently and expect to have an enemy war-fleet on your doorstep very quickly indeed. It does require a couple of play-throughs before everyone gets it, but once it sinks in it's likely to become a regular quick game for groups of geeks.

It does suffer from being a little sparse in places – most of the planets lack any real character and the research could really do with a bit more flavour, but overall it's a simple to play card-driven game with a nifty theme and that 'play me again' quality a lot of games like this sorely lack. Like many modern games it first launched on Kickstarter and has picked up a great following. The expansion is due out soon.

A very similar game is *Race for the Galaxy*, though whereas *Eminent Domain* is more about planning four or five steps ahead, *Race* requires thinking about your opponents' moves a lot more. There is less bluffing and a lot more control required here. It's also more involved; as cards are drawn various rules are introduced making turn resolution an often daunting task. Like many games produced by Rio Grande Games it is perhaps more complicated than it should be, though once you've



gotten into it, you're horribly addicted.

No column on galactic empires is complete without a mention of *Twilight Imperium*. This was Fantasy Flight's first ever boxed game and as such it has a very extensive collection of add-ons. Now in its third edition this thing is massive; filled with a modular board, a great deal of models and seemingly endless rules. If you wanted an honest-to-goodness simulation of being some sort of Space Opera style warlord, then this is the closest thing on the market. It is not a friendly game for beginners – the basic set will take a minimum of 4 hours to play and additional blocks take even longer. We will come back to *Twilight Imperium* and its incredible scope in a future column.

For those who want their planetary invasions on a smaller scale, there's always tie-in game *Star Trek Expeditions*. Designed by German games legend Reiner Knizia, this game focuses on a single planet. The people of Nibia have to decide if they want to be part of the Klingon Empire or the friendlier Federation. You all play classic Enterprise crew and the aim of the game is to do enough good deeds whilst also keeping the Klingons at bay. It's a sort of dice based version of Whack-A-Mole, but rather than moles you have unhappy aliens who need all sorts of attention and instead of a hammer you have Kirk and chums. The trick is getting the right person in the right job – Spock is not the man you want when it comes to distracting the Senator's daughter, for example.

We have only scratched the surface on the sort of megalomania one can enjoy with friends, dice and cardboard, though if you don't like the idea of being the next Darth Vader you can always stick to gentler games. Like *Risk*.

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Target

By Brett Pritchard

His grip on the rifle tightened as the sweat gathered like a flood about his furrowed brow. His teeth clenched so tightly he worried his gums might begin to flow crimson.

The target had yet to arrive at the agreed kill point. He had been waiting in this crouched position for some time - waiting was a key requirement of the job, his mentors had told him. Patience was a commodity that would obviously be reinforced by experience. This was after all his first assignment.

He practised the mental exercises he had devised with his mentors to keep his mind as sharp as a knife, to keep it as it needed to be.

Ensuring always that the very forefront of his consciousness remained clear, unoccupied. Ready and focussed for the task in hand.

Time became immaterial as he drifted into an almost out of body state, yet he remained as tensed and prepared to strike as a coiled spring. He may have been there for seconds, minutes, hours, he couldn't say.

At that moment the limousine arrived.

It was almost time.

The target emerged from his vehicle, flanked by security guards and special agents, the street packed with journalists, photographers and members of the public.

A thousand flashbulbs in a cacophony of voices lost in the convoluted questions, cheers, hollers and boos of so many. A scene of controlled and regulated chaos.

The vantage point had been well chosen, fool proof. Duplicating the uniform of the local Police Department, with whom the surrounding roof tops were crawling, had been easy. Fabricating the necessary ID to get into position had been child's play. A system that relied so heavily upon so many different forms of security only served to give his superiors more tools for the necessary subterfuge.

The target took a moment to wave to the onlookers as he entered the building where his big speech was to be held. The kill was to occur upon his leaving the building so as to have maximum impact, leaving his speech undermined. Creating the right amount of shock and leaving so many demoralised. Just as it was planned...

His superiors had their motives, their agendas for why this was to happen. It had been made clear to him that his only concern was the deed itself. He was a cog in an altogether larger machine...

The target entered the imposing building amid the cacophony of hysteria. The speech was to be broadcast on the big screens in the city as well as worldwide, there were cameras waiting outside the building too. Everyone was going to see this, as it was by design. Further waiting now lay ahead.

In the seemingly vast yawning chasm of time that descended upon him, his mind seemed to journey off in a million different directions.

This was to be his first kill, the culmination of years of training, mental conditioning; conscience treated as a symptom to be cured. Remorse tackled as an enemy to be vanquished. Compassion warped into something devoid of all peaceful notions...

And yet now he faltered.

Here he stood on the very cusp of history. A tipping point that would alter the very fabric of civilised society, and tomorrow mankind would awake to a world changed forever. Breeding a malleable populace... A climate of fear ripe for manipulation, people's spirit sapped, the man on the street's faith in all that was decent ravaged. And he would make it happen. Here. Now. On this day at the merest and simplest click of a trigger, he would change the world.

This was an intoxicating notion - that magnitude of power was almost worthy of some sort of god. And yet his anonymity meant that nobody would ever know that it was him.

A hidden god...

How would it look he wondered? He tried to visualise it in his mind. He imagined the screams of the onlookers, the horror that would be carved into their faces. There to remain. Would the target simply fall to the ground or spasm into some sort of horrific dance of death? Would he scream? Would he feel it, or would it be so sudden as to be devoid of any pain? Would his eyes pop out of his skull in a grotesque projectile fashion as the bullet hit on an explosion of blood and sinew?

Or would it be clean... simple... clinical?

He felt sick to his stomach and yet he didn't move a muscle. Reading himself and yet with every thought wondering if he should now show mercy?

There was no mercy, this was his mission. He must execute the target. He was a man, just like him, no idea what was coming... This was as it should be, he was a target, nothing more.

Today he'd become someone else, a murderer, a killer. Today he'd fulfil his function, do as he was trained. Maybe he still had a choice, he could remain a man. There was no choice to be made, eliminate the target.

The target emerged from the building, time seemingly slowing to but a crawl.

This was his last chance; he didn't have to do this.

All was going to plan, target in sight.

He was trembling, the world was shaking in his telescopic sights.

The conditioning kicked in. He was entirely still, his mind and body suddenly an oasis of calm, devoid of all thought or movement.

The target stopped to wave to the crowd once more, framed in the crosshairs...

With one final deep breath and not a moment's hesitation he pulled the trigger, and became a god.

Art by Rylan Cavell

Paul Mount's



This month TV Zone wakes up to the wonders of Sleepy Hollow and samples the delights of 'original online drama' with Amazon's The After...

Back in issue 390, previewing the big new American genre dramas for the 2013-2014 season, I didn't hold out much hope for Fox's *Sleepy Hollow*. I pretty much hooted with derision at a concept so high it stank. Based on Washington Irving's 1820 short story, *Sleepy Hollow* promised to pitch a resurrected Ichabod Crane 250 years into the future, waking up in the present day town of the same name with his bitter nemesis the Headless Horseman in hot pursuit. Ichabod (Tom Mison) teams up with Detective Abbie Mills (Nicole Beharie) - much to the disdain of head of Police; Frank Irving (Orlando Jones) - to combat not only the Headless Horseman but other Horsemen of the Apocalypse who, they realise, are following in his wake. "The series is likely to either draw in an audience who can't believe what they're watching or sink without trace", I wrote with the wisdom born of decades of TV viewing. *But Hell, what do I know??*

Remarkably - and I'm genuinely not bitter; good TV is more important than my dodgy reputation - *Sleepy Hollow* is not only quite good it's also been a decent-sized hit, quickly renewed by Fox for a second season later this year. The reason the show works is that it's been done absolutely straight; it's a proper drama which combines the traditions of the 'Police procedural' with well-realised and extremely atmospheric classic Gothic supernatural elements. Crucially, it's not remotely camp and its tongue is kept well away from its cheek; the scripts are packed with witty 'fish out of water' gags as Ichabod comes to grips with miracles of the 21st century such as the internet, phone apps and bottled

water but the characters and situations are played commendably straight-faced. This isn't remotely kid's stuff and the show pushes the envelope just as far as it can for Prime Time Network TV. Ichabod's recurring nemesis is a relentless, headless killing machine (who occasionally lets rip with a machine gun which is really all kinds of cool) and he's (un)pleasantly gruesome with his bloody severed neck but the show doesn't make the mistake of wheeling him out week after week. When he does appear, we're well aware that the stakes are high and that greater troubles are

brewing for this new and unlikely partnership; elsewhere there are equally hair-raising boogeymen doing the rounds, from the Sandman, a vengeful witch, the Golem and my personal favourite, the tree-demon creature which traps Ichabod and Abbie in an old country house in episode nine.

Inevitably - and pleasingly - *Sleepy Hollow* isn't just 'story of the week' stuff. There are enough tangled relationships, story arcs and plot twists to keep the show's fans busy on the forums at least until the start of the second season. Ichabod's witchy wife Katrina is stuck in purgatory (we call it ITV2 in the UK), his best friend Abraham is revealed to be the Headless Horseman, Abbie's sister Jenny (Lyndie Greenwood), a patient in a mental institution for years, has her own connection to the weird goings-on at Sleepy Hollow. Then there's Ichabod and Abbie's new friend Henry Parrish (John Fringe Noble) who is a 'Sin Eater' (which I can't help mishearing as "a Sinitta" which conjures up terrible images all its own) who initially frees Ichabod from the curse which binds him to the Horseman but who, as we discover in the finale, has his own dark secrets.

So it's a busy little show and its tone and style has completely defied expectations that it would be a silly, arch, quickly-canned romp. It looks gorgeous, the frequent night time sequences are fantastically eerie and atmospheric and, in Mison (brilliantly deadpan and understated as Ichabod) and Beharie the show might have created the most electric TV partnership since Mulder and Scully, with similar amounts of will they/won't they built into their relationship. The frantic, exposition heavy two-part finale packs a real punch, the lead characters scattered to the winds and Ichabod back underground where we met him in the very first episode. As season-ending cliffhangers go, it's up there with the best.





Sleepy Hollow is surprisingly good, eminently watchable but, like *Grimm* and *Once Upon A Time*, it's still not quite the stuff of truly great fantasy TV. But for a show which was all but written-off months before it aired, it's a miracle that it's as good as it is and it looks set to be a reliable show in Fox's schedules for seasons to come as long as its writers can keep up the level of energy and invention displayed in season one.

THE AFTER

Believe it or not, I'm a bit of a Luddite. I'm still not convinced that this electricity malarkey is going to catch on when the novelty's worn off. When it comes to television, I prefer to watch programmes on my TV; I'm old-fashioned that way. Until recently, I thought that 'streaming' was just something your nose does when you've got a cold. But even I had to heave myself reluctantly into the 21st century earlier this year and join the Netflix generation so I could watch the final batch of *Breaking Bad* episodes here in the UK just hours after they'd screened in the US. I can see the appeal of 'TV on demand', the ability to watch shows and films when you want to rather than being enslaved to the whims of TV schedulers. But I miss that odd and very probably fanciful feeling of 'shared experience', watching an episode of my favourite show knowing that out there millions of other people are experiencing it at *exactly the same time*.

But those days, like Piers Morgan's TV

career, are a thing of the past. Netflix and Amazon are now creating their own original programming and Netflix's *House of Cards*, now into its second season, has been applauded as one of the best TV shows of the last few years - and it's never been anywhere near a traditional TV broadcaster. Amazon's efforts over the past couple of years have included commissioning a string of pilot episodes which they 'stream' online (see, I'm getting the hang of all this new-fangled terminology. VCR! There's another one!) and then asking its customers which ones they quite enjoyed

and which ones they'd like to see more of. Last year's offerings turned up a decent if frankly unnecessary pilot based on the 2009 comedy/horror flick *Zombieland* (which wasn't picked up for a series) and this year's five drama pilots include *The After*, written and directed by Chris Carter. Older readers may remember Carter as the blond-haired surfer dude who dragged sci-fi kicking and screaming out of the cult ghetto in the 1990s and made *The X-Files* a worldwide phenomenon. But less well-received follow-up material - *Millennium* and *The Lone Gunmen* on TV and a willfully misjudged second *X-Files*



feature film in 2008 - have seen his profile plunging so low he might as well have been living underground.

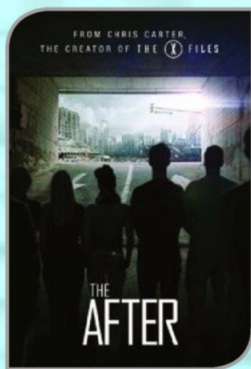
But the post-apocalypse promise of *The After* intrigued me so I fired up my Amazon account, took the plunge... and watched a TV episode on my computer. It'll never catch on. (It might.) But forty-odd minutes later I really wished I hadn't bothered. Whatever magic touch Chris Carter once had has long gone; *The After* is a disaster of apocalyptic proportions. Badly written, badly directed (take a bow, Mr Carter), I've rarely seen a TV episode with such horrible, nasty, unsympathetic characters (played largely by people you've never heard of or would especially want to see again).

Nor have I seen such a cheap looking and uninteresting end of the world. When it happens (whatever it is; the pilot chooses not to explain what's happened, other than hinting vaguely at a massive *Revolution*-style worldwide loss of power) our grim, core characters are stuck in a darkened lift. They then spend a good fifteen minutes in an underground car park shouting and swearing (f*** me, do they swear - Carter's like a cheeky kid whose parents have nipped off to the pub, giving him carte blanche to *f and blind* in a desperate attempt to impress his friends) before one of them finally breaks out into the cold light of day. We're none the wiser. Hundreds of extras blunder around looking not especially concerned (I've never seen extras - or *supporting artists* as we prefer to be known - so badly choreographed); a couple of helicopters smash into a building in the episode's only money shot, and then we're back with our 'heroes' as they escape the not-especially-chaotic chaos of the city and take refuge in the sprawling mansion home of one of their number, "the old lady" (played by Sharon Lawrence, who is *two years younger than me, thanks*). Old lady indeed!

The After is not only woefully realised,

it's wittily conceived from just about every angle. Carter is so desperate to come in from the creative cold that's he resorting to playing every cynical trick in the book. Away from the constraints of Network TV he's overindulged himself with this new freedom he's been given. So where the smarter show might allow its characters to let out the odd R-rated cuss word every now and again for dramatic effect, Carter's bunch of ghastly stereotypes - a struggling French actress, a gutsy female cop, a black con on the run who quickly takes advantage of the situation (whatever it is), a sleazy businessman and his whore-for-hire, a genuinely appalling foul mouthed Irish drunk and that old fall-back, the gay clown (yes, *another one*) - seem to do nothing but throw f-bombs at one another. Inevitably, as you'd do well to tell any small children you might have handy, it's not big and it's not clever and after a while it just gets incredibly tedious and actually quite offensive.

The schoolyard swearing might be excusable if the characters were remotely interesting and give any indication that their hopeless lives are worth a damn or that there might even be a reason that the viewer might care what happens to them. But there isn't. They talk in appalling clichés, they seem utterly unmotivated and remarkably uncurious about what catastrophe seems to have overwhelmed the world. So when they get to the mansion belonging to "the old lady" (*two years younger than me, remember*), they just swear and sneer at one another a bit more. In one extraordinary sequence - *because we can do nudity here, too* - Mr Businessman's girlfriend strips off and plunges into the pool for a nice swim even as the city burns in the distance. Mr Sweary O'Irish wanders over for a quick leer and our token nude looks up at him demurely and mutters "You know I'm really frightened about all this." Yeah, so



frightened you strip down to your nacks in the middle of the apocalypse and enjoy a lovely ten lengths in a complete stranger's Olympic-size swimming pool.

Just to remind us how much he'd really like another shot at making a telly series, Carter packs his script with utterly random plot points clearly designed to pique the audience's interest and encourage them to support the show for a pick-up. *Please don't*. It transpires that all these terrible people share the same birthday - March 7th - and they have similar markings on their bodies. Fleeing the mansion after it's attacked by some sweaty (and sweaty, of course) thugs, they hide in nearby woods where *something absolutely ridiculous* happens in a final last-ditch attempt to get viewers to yes-vote this nonsense into a series. I won't ennoble this twaddle by recounting it here but it involves an odd-looking creature which turns out to be double-jointed; it's good for a quick laugh if nothing else.

And seriously, *The After* is good for nothing else. It's the work of a man whose mojo is lost in the mists of time, a man who really has no place in a modern TV world which has left him far, far behind. But, terrifyingly, memories of *The X-Files*, the promise (or threat) of an ongoing *Lost*-style 'what-the-Hell-is-going-on-here' story arc and an enduring fascination for end-of-the-world scenarios suggest that *The After* could win enough support to persuade Amazon to green light a full season. F***, that's a f*****g prospect more f*****g terrifying than any f*****g apoco-f*****g-lype. F*** that, I'm f*****g done for this f*****g month.

+

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but only if you want to.

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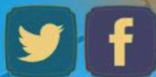


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a column by The Zombaby



Alice was really naughty!

My Daddy is really busy this month, working on the next Starburst issue, which is special and a number too high for me to count yet. I thought that I would tell you about a movie that we went to see, and that you should also see because it was good.

Me and my sister, Nocturna - The Vambaby, like to watch horror films and Daddy thought that we would want to see **Only Lovers Left Alive**. This was the first time that we had been taken to what Daddy calls an *Arsehouse* cinema. This one was called the Cornerhouse, and was in Manchester. He warned us that there would be people called *hipsters* there, and used lots of words that I am not allowed to say when he told us about them. They have beards that don't look right, strange hair, old looking trainers, hats, and glasses that they don't use to see things with. There were lots of them. One was even on the counter selling us tickets. He gave me a funny stare when I asked if they sold hotdogs and popcorn. They didn't sell them. I think that hipsters really want to eat hotdogs and popcorn but think that they will look cleverer if they don't.

When we entered the cinema my sister Nocturna was keen to break the ice with the hipsters straight away. Off she went chasing them all over. Jumping on their backs and getting piggy back rides.

The hipsters turned out to be much more fun, and not nearly as boring as they seemed. They literally never stopped screaming, they were having that much fun. They got tired really easily though. They didn't even make it back to their seats. Instead they just lay down on the floor, one by one. At least they were quiet when the film started.

This is my first review so I will do my best to remember everything. **Only Lovers Left Alive** is a vampire movie directed by someone that sounds like Jam Jar. It is about two vampires named Adam and Eve that love each other so they kiss lots. They have been alive even longer than my sister, maybe thousands of years. They are both into *arsehouse* type stuff, and are like the hipsters we met tonight, but waaaay more fun to watch. Adam is played by Mr Hiddleston from **The Avengers** and Eve is played by Ms Swinton who I have seen in **The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe**. I think that they pretend really well. They are very good pretenders. Not like that silly lot from the **Twilight** movies (I did not even believe that the one that pretended to be Edward was even a boy!). Adam is a bit grumpier than Eve, and even has a wooden bullet to kill himself with. He is very glum isn't he? Adam shouldn't be, he lives in a very cool house. It's full of loads of crazy stuff, and musical instruments. I would like to live there, even though it is in a place called Detroit which looks dead scruffy. They need to clean it up, and build some new houses. It would look better.

The film is really nice to look at. At the beginning you have a bit where Eve is lying on her bed wearing something weird with the room and a strange plastic thing that used to be a cd spinning around. It looked dead good. The film was also full of clever ideas (no wonder the hipsters were silent - they must have been really happy). It turns out that Adam and Eve have been really busy bees. Over the centuries they have got famous people to pass off their work as their own (even Mr Shakespeare). Adam even has his own type of electricity from Mr Nikola Tesla! I wish I had my own electricity. There is also a plane company called *Lumiere* that takes you to places at night. My sister is well impressed as she can join a band at 15 and tour Europe, without crumbling into dust.

The other pretenders were good as well. Mr Hurt was a great vampire, and I thought he did look like he had been alive for thousands of years. Daddy did say some words I am not allowed to say when the man from **Star Trek** appeared though. I thought he was ok, but he does look like he is having to try harder than the rest of them. I was surprised half way through when Alice In Wonderland turned up playing Eve's naughty sister Ava. Ava is even naughtier than Vambaby. Upsetting things, and making Adam and Eve even grumpier than before.

I thought Adam and Eve seemed really cool and fun, but they have to drink blood, and it means that they have to be really naughty, even though they are cleverer than that. I thought that **Only Lovers Left Alive** was a very good horror film. I think that grown-ups make films so that we can stare and forget bad things. I forgot some bad things when I was watching this nice movie.

Something did upset me though. I am not very happy with them calling humans "zombies". This was meant as an insult. There is nothing wrong with being *Living Impaired* like me, as long as you are not causing trouble like they are in **The Walking Dead**. But I do think that they are probably just fed up with the one called Rick always moaning and complaining. They still shouldn't bite people though - it's not very nice!

When we got up to leave the cinema, and the lights came on, it turned out that the hipsters were really clumsy as well as lazy. They had spilt their Vimto all over the floor - it was everywhere. They had calmed down a lot though and just quietly walked behind us until they got outside where they used their bat wings to fly home. Maybe they weren't so bad after all?

Remember - be a hugger not a biter!

Love Zack
The Zombaby

Zack The Zombaby lives in a house full of toys and games with his Mummy, Daddy and Nocturna The Vambaby. He helps out at Starburst for his pocket money.
You can send him hugs at
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